



KUMBH MAHĀKUMBH

MYTHOLOGICAL, SPIRITUAL AND PRACTICAL

ED: RATNA LAHIRI





Dr Ratna Lahiri studied for her Ph.D on Human Values in Modern Hindi Literature (1982) under the guidance of the Late Professor Vidyaniwas Misra and subsequently taught Hindi Language and Literature

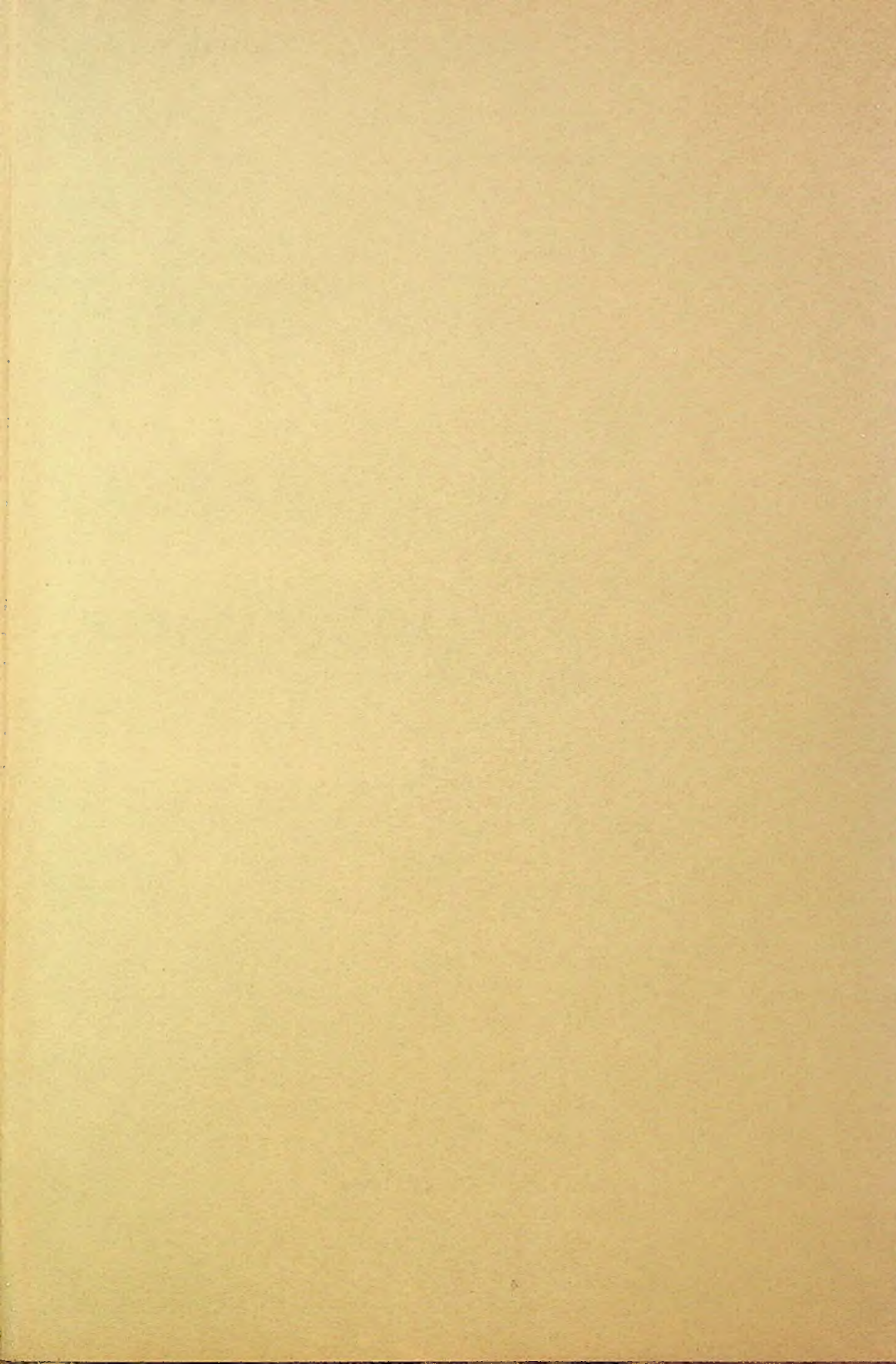
at the University of Delhi. Her deep interest in Ancient Indian cultural Values and Indian literature is reflected in her contributions to various Encyclopedias, beginning with the *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* (Sahitya Akademi). Subsequently she worked at the Department of Religious Studies, Columbia, University of South Carolina, for the *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (IHRF) followed by translation cum summarizing assistance at the University of Washington in Seattle, for some volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy* (Karl Potter). Dr. Lahiri has taught Indian Studies at the Asian Center at the University of Philippines in Metro Manila, and presented many papers at various international and National conferences. As a Fellow of the Indian School of Advanced Study, Shimla, she has published her seminal research work *Philippine Rāmāyān: Rāmāyān Sandarbha*, translating the Maranao versions of the Rāma story in the oral traditions of the lake Lanao region of the southern island of Mindanao. Her work on this Islamic Ramayana also presents original research in Hindi regarding the ancient Indo-Philippine interaction. She also edited and translated a beautiful production of Vidyaniwas Mishra's book in English *The Hindu Way: A Search for the eternal*, published by Shubh.



The Late Vidya Niwas Mishra (1926–2005) was a scholar, savant and a noted Hindi-Sanskrit litterateur from the Allahabad University and a disciple of the learned professor Kshetreshchandra

Chattopadhyaya. After working on the Hindi dictionary under the direction of the legendary scholar Rahul Sankrityayan, he himself became a legendary scholar as his erudition was honored at various universities in India and abroad. He was a visiting Professor at the California and Washington universities, and Director of the Kulapati Munshi Hindi Vidyapeeth, Agra. He was also Vice-Chancellor of the Kashi Vidyapeeth and the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University. For many years, he was the Editor-in-Chief of the leading Hindi daily Navbharat Times. He authored,

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LAHIRI, MISRA & TRIPATHI



SHUBHI PUBLICATIONS
GURGAON, INDIA



First Published - 2016

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**Published by
Shubhi Publications**

Printed in India

Prologue

Drops of Amrita

The Sanskrit word *Samudra Manthan* literally means a churning of the Oceans- in this case the Ocean of Milk (Ksheer Sāgar). The word *manthana*, also implies studied churning of the mind, specially of a deeper state of concentration, in order to analyze and weigh the pros and cons of the problem and to find appropriate solutions. Such is the Churning of this Ocean of Milk that it yields many other gems in the search for the ultimate pot of Nectar- the final solution to the problem. The symbology in detail will be apparent in later chapters.

The story in short, goes thus. The demigods or *devatās* in heaven had lost their strength and luster due to a curse. The purpose was to regain their lost strength and to gain immortality. This had to be done with the help of the *dānavas*, their cousins and sworn enemies. After acquiring the pot of ambrosia, the *dānavas* had to be exempted from partaking the ambrosia, otherwise the natural order of good winning over evil would be disturbed. This, of course, led to the war, the pernnial *devāsura sangram*. Vishnu comes as Mohini to help in the distribution of the *amrita* that arose out of the ocean. It may seem a bit unfair that the Asuras were denied the fruit of the labor that was undertaken by the suras (gods) and asuras together. However, from the very beginning of the project, the Asuras were not intended to be energized with ambrosia, as it would be too dangerous to let the power of immortality strengthen their demoniac tendencies any further. Vishnu had promised he would make sure they did not get it, for the ultimate good of humanity. So as Mohini he cheated the Asuras from getting any *amrita*.

Jayanta, the son of Indra finally runs with the pot with the *dānavas* in hot pursuit. Drops of this life giving *amrita* fall at four holy places on the land of Bhāratvarsha, namely, Prayāg, Haridwar, Nāsik and Ujjain. These are the places where the *Kumbh* and *Mahākumbh* melās or gatherings are held, to rejuvenate the people, and periodically remind the population of the great event that took place in primordial Time.



One day of the gods equal twelve human years, so the Poorna Kumbh is held once in twelve years, when the stars and planets align in the same way.

This is one of the most important stories of Indian Mythology, and can be found in most of the important traditional texts, the Purānas and epics. It will be elaborated in detail in the forthcoming chapters. The symbology is elaborate, but the story itself immensely interesting with unexpected twists and turns, and hence the appeal to one and all. Children love to listen to the story again and again. Later, hopefully, it will dawn on them that the entire episode is full of innuendoes and deeper meanings to be meditated upon, maybe even leading to attitudinal changes and solutions.

This churning itself may be an end in itself since it produces innumerable gems of material and spiritual bliss. They will be gems of great worth that will hold the traveler in good stead on the path of Spiritual progress. The gems will go to the deserving one, so the churning must be done under the direction of a Guru steeped in tradition. They will be gems of great worth that will hold the traveler in good stead on the path of Spiritual as well as material progress. Spiritual, indicated by the ultimate prize, Amrita, or the elixir of Life. Material, implied by all the wish fulfilling gems of great worth that emerge from this Ocean, including Sri Laxmi, the goddess of every kind of Wealth.

However, this will not be easy in the beginning; a lot of toil and trouble will also yield *Kālakoota*, a devastating poison which no one can tolerate. Only Shiva, or by becoming like Shiva, can one drink this poison thus, some great self sacrifices need to be made for the greater good, in a great project. Shiva's magnanimous gesture of drinking up the poison for the greater good, solves the problem of the obnoxious fumes of the poison. It is told that Pārvati the consort of Shiva, by touching his throat to keep the poison at bay there, saved Siva a lot of pain. Shiva's throat then turned blue with the poison, so this act made Shiva known as Neelkanth- the One with the blue throat. The role of



his wife, a man's Shakti, is therefore of great importance on the way to successful achievement. Also important is the cooperation of powers that be, like Vishnu and Shiva, who preserve and destroy, to ensure that nature itself would help. They are the enablers of the Natural law. Trees and herbs that fall into the milk add to the medicinal value of this elixir of Life, thereby emphasizing the importance of ecological values and Natural medicine. The god of Ayurveda himself rises with the elixir of Life, implying the Natural way of life is the best prescription to good health.

Thus layers and layers of meaning are enshrined in this myth. They ultimately unfold itself to the thinking mind as one goes deeper into the characters, otherwise serving the purpose of a most interesting story, leading to the ritual origins of the Kumbh Melas. Like almost every ritual in the Hindu way, the deeper meanings may or may not be sought by the performer, but all in all it is an unique departure from the mundane, transporting the pilgrims to another dimension of experience altogether, and thereby rejuvenating them physically, mentally and spiritually.

Many questions arise when the story is recounted. Why did the Devas cheat the Asuras resulting in the fierce fight and how did the nectar spill on earth to commemorate the event forever? Who were Rahu and Ketu and why were they dismembered? What was the triad of Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva doing and what was their role in guiding these events? Why is the cyclical celebration of the event according to zodiacal time? How come the numbers that attend the Kumbh bathing festivals on the scheduled timings, keep increasing every year? All this and more will be indicated in the forthcoming pages.

It has always been a source of wonderment to historians and travelers alike as to how this huge congregation of people takes place in ever increasing numbers, thereby becoming the world's largest religious gathering. Mega cities appear and disappear like magic to enable this celebration, with thousands of devotees converging from the length

and breadth of India, and now even from abroad, to take a ritual bath. No one can predict exactly how many will attend, because no invites are sent and no RSVP's received. Arrangements need to be made by respective local governments for about a hundred million people needing housing, sanitation and food for a length of time. People come and go, and on appointed 'auspicious days' the traffic arrangements themselves are a nightmare.

A study group from Harvard Business School went to Prayāg to observe the formal and informal structures that spawn across the temporary Megacity that erupts in accordance with a particular stellar configuration. They were amazed to see the large section of humanity from cities and villages alike, congregating just to take a ritual bath. So impressed were they with the order within the chaos, that they initiated Project KF27 to monitor and find innovative ways to bring technology to the aid of the various areas of health, transportation and other civic issues that arise in the temporary cities that spring up in these four places where these drops of nectar are said to have fallen.

It is obvious that what actually happens is an intangible experience for some that deserves study, though it may not be statistically quantified in terms of the deep emotions involved. However there is much scope for improvement in the technological aids that could be provided and the massive transport arrangements that need to be made all over India. In a congregation of this sort the simple villagers could be and even are, exploited by various charlatans, and the small town dweller will be wary of the known and unknown pitfalls. However, the average Indian is prepared to take it in his stride because in his mind even the ritual gains outweigh the pecuniary losses. They come in hordes, and more and more spectators come because it leads to an understanding of India and the Indian ethos. The deeper implications may or may not be obvious and for many it may just seem like a meaningless ritual, but it is still an experience of a Lifetime.



Some say this really was once a cattle fair, or a business cum tourism opportunity, engineered in the Indian style with a strong spiritual veneer. For some it is an opportunity to observe real holy men or even the devious ways of charlatans, or what have you. Actually it is all this and much more. It is a world in itself, springing up and disappearing in zodiacal Time. For the culturally curious and the observant casual visitor alike, a documenting of the almost yearly *Melas* that take place by turns at Allahabad, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain, and now Kumbakonam, ultimately becomes a study in the tremendous capacity of a large portion of mankind to live by Faith and ritual.

The venue, dates and timings of forthcoming Kumbh are known and calculated precisely by astrologers.

When the Sun is in the Makar rāshi or Capricorn, it begins in Prayag, the confluence of the holy rive ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati. When in Leo, it is called Sinhasta, and occurs at Nasik and or Ujjain and one day in Kumbakonam in the South. Thus it is sometimes in January-February, and sometimes in April May, but always while the Sun is in the northward or *Uttarāyana* phase, between January 15 and July 16. The event occurs by turns in the four cities specified in medieval texts. The specific bathing dates are also calculated by astrologers and posted or spread by word of mouth to the pilgrims.

Now a days the latest electronic gadgets are used in the cities that spring up, the latest in managerial skills can be tested as the crowds get larger and larger. Urban planners and traffic experts organize railroad and city traffic to dovetail into their arrangements, but the focus remains always on the ritual baths, the traditional sects that congregate and most of all, on the crowds that come in hordes to have a dip in the sacred waters that they believe will surely help their ancestors and themselves alike. The reason they congregate is elaborately described as a mythological tale in the Hindu traditional texts known as the *Puranas*, of which some major texts and translations have been excerpted in the later sections of this book.



It is believed that the stellar configurations that were prevailing at the time, and the stellar bodies that were in charge of watching over the path of the pot of nectar, were witness to the original event. Remembering it, they become instrumental in charging those same places and waters with special spiritual vibrations, when those very same configurations occur in the firmament. It all began thereafter as a momentous recurring window in Time. Whenever the same stellar configuration occurs at these points, it is believed that the places and waters get energized with the same positive vibrations that occurred before. Thousands gather to soak in these vibrations, and have a dip in these waters. After all, the Sun, Jupiter the guru of the gods, and those configurations of Capricorn and Leo etc are still there, and converge over the same areas even today. Water as an element is supposed to imbibe vibrations very easily as has been proven by some recent studies. The holy banks of the sacred rivers that flow in these areas, namely, the Gangā, Godāvari and Shiprā, and other water-bodies like the Rāmakunda, were a silent witness to it then and continue to get charged by the same stellar configurations now as if to endorse the order that prevails in the Universe. In the Mahāmaham tank in southern Kumbakonam, the story also relates to a pot, but it is a one day bath with another story, and happens also when the Sun enters Leo once in twelve years. Even as the stars and galaxies move around the firmament in a prescribed order, without clashing, and even as the aberrations or comets that take place, can be predetermined by astronomical calculations, the order of the Universe reigns Supreme. So also this Kumbh will happen, in the prescribed and predetermined Time and Place again and again.

So the *manthan* drops fell over the sacred places and sacred rivers in Prayāg, Nāsik, Haridwar and Ujjain, but the quarrel over the pot continued and in later times once again, Garuda the mythical bird was also instrumental in dropping a few drops here and there, but then that is a different story altogether. The essay by famous astrologer-scholar Ramnaresh Tripathi, describes how other areas in India, like Vrindavana and Kumbakonam in the south, also celebrate Kumbh at certain times.



For the stories about the four primarily named cities, there are many versions too. Some say the pitcher containing the ambrosia was kept for awhile in these places by Jayanta. Others say the son of Indra was fleeing with the vessel, with the asuras in hot pursuit, so some drops fell. Whatever the versions, there is no denying that with travel and communications becoming easier by the years, more and more people converge to these places to take a dip in the waters during those auspicious stellar configurations that occur periodically. One day of the gods is considered to be equal to one year of the humans and so the *Mahākumbh* takes place only once in twelve years. Similar astrological conditions give rise to the Ardh Kumbh once in six years and are celebrated only at Haridwār and Prayāg, at the banks of the perennially holy river Gangā.

Some Historical References

The first historically documented mention of the Kumbh gathering is already found in the recordings of the visits to India in 629-645 CE of the Chinese traveler Hiuan Tsang, during the rule of King Harshavardhan (606-647 CE), and later historians and writers like Mark Twain.

“It is wonderful, the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys and endure the resultant miseries.... It is done in love, or it is done in fear; I do not know which it is. No matter what the impulse is, the act born of it is beyond imagination.”, wrote Mark Twain in 1895, after witnessing that year’s Kumbh Mela. Maybe he did not know that the secret of the gatherings of the Kumbh- or *Mahākumbh* lies in the mythological tale of the *Samudra Manthan*, which is remembered again and again. It is due to India’s propensity to mythologize significant allegories as interesting stories, installing itself in the collective unconscious of the people. Thus even in those difficult times, people would travel to attend the Kumbh. This way the knowledge would be passed on to future generations



through the oral traditions, reflected in Art, Craft, Sculpture, Dance and Music.

The Kumbh Mela thus celebrates an immersion in the memory of this primordial churning because it has to be relived periodically as an aid to seekers of transcendence. It is celebrating a moment that uses Time to transcend Time. This is the secret of the Kumbh and Mahakumbh Melas in India, where millions gather at the appointed Space and Time, to rejuvenate their Selves with a few drops of Spiritual Ambrosia. In the long run, it indicates by its deeply symbolical terminology, a way to live life beautifully and meaningfully, thereby metamorphosing a mundane and mortal existence into a meaningful one.

For some others, it is a reliving of the memory of those charged drops of auspiciousness that are believed to energize the waters repeatedly when a certain stellar configuration occurs in appointed places related to the story. For others it is a ritual followed by their ancestors. For some others it can become even more meaningful. Someone has to drink the poison, for the greater good, like Shiva. Someone has to hold the fulcrum and bear the pain of the churning on his back, like Vishnu, who took his second incarnation as the Kurma or the Giant Turtle, to do so. In this way it almost literally becomes a search for meaning and immortality within a mortal existence. It is no wonder then that more and more numbers flock to the event as travel and facilities improve over the years. Now the facilities are an issue for the local governments to bother about. They will come in hordes to have that dip come what may, they will live under the sky, cook on an open fire and camp with whatever facilities are available, and take that freezing dip in the bitter January cold on the banks of the river Gangā. When Jupiter and Sun converge in the constellation Leo- by the Godāvari in Nāsik, and by the Kshiprā river in Ujjain they will also come in thousands to avail of the now more conducive circumstances. Now there are airconditioned tents available for the reach who can afford it. Electricity round the clock at the camp site, enables many ashrams to orchestrate luxurious to tourist



facilities for the reach, but for the most it is still an occasion for bearing hardships, that is tapas.

When the *Simha Rāshi* or Leo hosts these stars and planets, or when they thus become *Simhastha*, the Kumbh has to be in Nasik and/or Ujjain. The finer points of stellar configurations dictating the Kumbh dates of Nasik and Ujjain, have been discussed in the third essay describing the astrological implications. Whatever the weather, the approximate dates are known, the 'sādhus come as prescribed, and the people converge. It is after all a celebration of Mind over incidentals. The power of the story is such, and the atmosphere in the mela campus so charged, that it becomes easy to face the bitter cold of the month of January or February, to take that early morning dip in the Gangā in Prayāg and Haridwar, or face any other problems by the Kshiprā or Godāvarī. The body shivers but the mind is elated in the deep joy and bliss of relating to the ancestors who had similarly done the same. And so, one must know the whole story related to the Kumbh and the churning it celebrates.

Now the demigods of Hindu Mythology are led by Indra as their king, in *Swarga*, (loosely translated as Heaven) in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mythology. It is not quite the ultimate 'heaven' of the middle-eastern religions, but a sort of problem free luxurious abode for the natural powers, all following a certain Natural Order of the Universe, and the law of Karma. As one sows, so shall one reap. Therefore, this status is also awarded temporarily to those humans acquiring great merit, but once the bank of merit expires, they have to return to the cycle of rebirth, and so it goes on. This Heaven is difficult to acquire, but not the ultimate goal. The ultimate spiritual goal is *moksha* or liberation from all temporary likes and dislikes of the lesser Self and realizing the Highest Self within, so as to free oneself from the cycle of birth and death altogether. But the story that is more relevant here, goes like this, with minor alterations, depending on the purāna emphasizing the role of Shiva or Vishnu.



The story in detail

One day, the powerful Lord Indra, while strolling along on his royal elephant, came across the hot-tempered ascetic Durvāsā who offered him a very special blessing in the form of a very special garland. In his usual arrogance and stupidity and a mind inevitably corrupted by Power, Indra, without bowing to it as a special gift, placed it on the elephant's head. The elephant in turn threw it down on the ground, and trampled on it, thus further angering the ascetic. Durvasa then cursed Indra and his entire kingdom of demigods, to be ruined, and the gods to lose their immortality and other special powers. Thus they became feeble and lack luster. (devata > div, means the lustrous, brilliant)

To cut a long story short, their enemies the Dānavas then conquered the heavens with brute force and the gods then ran for help to Brahmā the grandsire of creation. Brahmā directed them in turn to Vishnu the sustainer, and maintainer of order in the Universe. Vishnu decided that the churning of the Ocean would bring back all the lost treasures, and yield a pot of ambrosia which if partaken by the gods would make them indestructible and immortal. The Dānavas, with their brutal strength, would have to be lured to do this arduous task since the devas had lost their strength, but ultimately some excuse would have to be found to keep them from partaking of the prized ambrosia, to stop them becoming stronger forever.

Now for churning the ocean one needed a giant churning rod and a base on which it could be twisted and turned. The divine mountain Mandāra, was to be this churning rod, but it began to sink once placed in the ocean. Vishnu then took his second incarnation as the *Kurma* or giant turtle to become the fulcrum bearer under the mountain, and bear the pressure of the central axis. The King of Serpents, Vāsuki, Shiva's helper and devotee, egged on by Ananta, Vishnu's serpent and another great Serpent King, became the strong rope which was wrapped round the pillar like mountain to be pulled and pushed at both ends. The



daityas demanded the mouth side of the serpent with a thousand heads. Vishnu immediately concurred, realizing the effect of the pulling on Vasuki's head that would spew forth poisonous fumes. As Vāsuki was pulled to and fro, the myriad mouths of the Serpent King spewed forth venom in large quantities. This weakened the Asuras, since the first by product of the churning was Kālkuta, the deadly poison.

Lord Shiva, auspiciousness incarnate, was then propitiated and asked to drink the poison for the greater good. Shiva held it in his throat and his throat turned blue. As a result he was known as Neelkanth, the blue-throated one. There are many versions of how this poison was stopped at the throat. It is said that Parvati, Shakti or Kāli, woman power incarnate, touched the throat and made it stop there or that Mā Tārā became the universal other goddess and fed him her breastmilk to neutralize the sting of the poison.

The churning then produced fourteen *Ratnas*, or precious gems, earlier lost by the devas, like *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth, *Uchchaisravā* the seven headed horse and *Airāvata* the celestial multi tusked elephant of Indra. There was *Kāmdhenu* the celestial cow and *Parijata* the wish fulfilling tree. Also emerged the *Kaustubh* jewel and *Shāranga* the auspicious bow and the mace called *Kaumodaki* of Vishnu, with the Conch shell *Pāñchjanya*. The *apsaras* or the beautiful divine maidens emerged with Rambha. The negative black poison *halāhal* and *jyeshthā* or *alakshmi* that brings misfortune also emerged.

The list of *Ratnas* varies from *Purāna* to *purana*, sometimes enumerating more or less than fourteen. Also emerged the not so precious *Vāruni* or intoxicating alcohol which the *Asuras* gladly took. Last but not the least, came *Dhanvantari* the god of medicines and Ayurveda, carrying the *Kumbha* filled with ambrosia. This indicated that a life properly lived according to the natural laws of Ayurveda and good health, would be the secret of longevity. Smaller details like the umbrella of Varun, the earrings of Indrani are added in different Versions of the story.



The Devas and Dānavas would not trust each other. Initially Vishnu as Mohini had taken over the pot for distribution and served it only to the devatās. Than Mohini passed on the pot to Indra's son Jayanta, who then ran away with the pot with the asuras in hot pursuit. Things went wrong with Rahu disguised himself as a deva and joined the line of devas. Chandra and Surya, the all knowing sun and moon, immediately reported the transgression to Vishnu as *Mohini*. Rāhu had to be cut into two because he was pretending to be a deva. Rāhu and Ketu- thus became the two astrological nodes. However, he had just swallowed the *amrita* so he became immortal anyway. To this day, he swallows the Sun and the Moon, to eclipse them temporarily, but he did become the only Asura to become immortal as a result. To this day his presence in the astrological chart is considered negative.

In the Vishnu Purāna, Lakshmi's emergence becomes the highlight, but the order of emergence is different in many puranas. Obviously, the order is not important, but to summarize, they were as follows with a few changes here and there.

लक्ष्मीः कौस्तुभपारिजातकसुराधन्वन्तरिश्चन्द्रमाः। ::
 गावः कामदुहा सुरेश्वरगजो रम्भादिदेवाङ्गनाः। ::
 अश्वः सप्तमुखो विषं हरिधनुः शङ्खोमृतं चाम्बुधेः। ::
 रत्नानीह चतुर्दश प्रतिदिनं कुर्यात्सदा मङ्गलम्। ::

That is, Lakshmi, Kaustubha Pārijāta, Vārūni or Surā, Dhanvantari, the Moon, the cow kām̐dhenu, the king of Elephants (Airāvata), Rambhā etc. celestial maidens or apsarās, the seven headed horse, (Ucchchairsravās), the Poison, Vishnu's bow, and the Conch, along with the Amrita came from the Ocean. These fourteen ratnas may ever be beneficial for us.

Lakshmi emerges in the end in another list, but to enumerate briefly,

1. Halāhala the deadly poison
2. the Kalpavriksha, celestial wish fulfilling tree or Pārijata,
3. the Kām̐dhenu or wish fulfilling Cow residing in heaven, Swarga



4. the multi-tusked elephant Airavata, that carries Indra,
5. the seven headed horse Uchchaisravā, again belonging to Indra or in some Puranas to Bali the lord of the Asuras
6. Lakshmi the goddess of wealth and consort of Vishnu, returning to Vishnu,
7. Kaustubha mani – returning to Vishnu, and many other jewels
8. Chandra the moon returning to Shiva
9. *Vārūni*- or alcohol happily taken by the devas or asuras, in different versions
10. *Shāranga*, the powerful bow and arrow, and his mace *Kaumodki*
11. Rambha and the divine maidens, the *apsaras*,
12. The *Pāñchjanya Shankha* or conch shell of Vishnu
13. Dhanvantari the god of Ayurveda, with
14. The pot of Amrita

The list differs or escalates to include a few more positive and negative Treasures but the essence of the story remains the same. The people who flock to celebrate do not remember the list precisely, but have a vague idea. They know undoubtedly that they would be blessed in many ways if they could only join the multitudinous throngs of people coming from all over India, and now even the world, to take a dip at the prescribed hour.

The primordial event is eulogized in various Puranas to underline the ability of the Human Spirit to use the Mind as an instrument to overcome the boundaries of mundane and mortal existence. It postulates an immersion into a timeless dimension of Spiritual Seeking. The story behind the event exists in popular mythology and is known in some versions even in Japan, China and other Asian countries. However, nowhere else has the popular mind been attracted for generations to just the four spots at specified times related to the myth. Nowhere do they gather in such huge numbers, in order to relive the myth and thereby rejuvenate both, the myth and themselves, as also thus connect to their ancestors who did the same.



They say “you cannot step into the same river twice”, but for the pilgrims to the Kumbh Melā, it is the same river or water body in which all their ancestors, including the famous Pandavas, Arjuna of the Bhagvada-Geeta fame, & avatars like Rama and Krishna, had also bathed here during the same configuration of planets. It is the same river that almost every holy man since, has stepped into at various points of their incarnate beings. It is like stepping into the same flow of tradition. It is Sacred Space in a dimension of Sacred Time. It is known that Ganga cannot be polluted even though so many sinners bathe in it, because the dust of the feet of the Saints that constantly purifies it. This is the reason why in the Shāhi Snān the Nāgā sādhus get the first privilege to bathe in the holy waters.

In the Hindu way, Faith alone prevails. ‘To each his own in accordance with one’s abilities and beliefs’, is a common understanding among Indians. So no rules are applied universally as to what the participant must or must not do as long as the spirit of Sacrality is not compromised. During the Kumbh, celibacy and purity in every manner (*Brahmacarya*) and Vegetarianism is expected. People living by their ashram rules, or individually, may follow their beliefs as they wish.

For the holy bath, first preference is given to the ascetic community, who are expected to be more evolved spiritually. It is they who are supposed to purify even the Gangā. This fact is clearly recognized in the ritual of the Shāhi Snān- or the ‘first bathing privilege’ accorded traditionally to the Nāgā (sparingly clad or even unclad sect of renunciates) Sādhus and various mendicant groups that converge from all over India. They are the ascetics from the ‘akhāras’ or sectarian groups of mendicants from different spiritual orientations, all accepted as leading to the same goal of salvation. Some are naked fakirs, and have given up even the bare necessities of clothing and conventional food and housing. Other sādhus or renunciates, come from various sects and the gathering is energized by their presence too. The ordinary folks from villages and towns bow down to them, seeking their blessings. Many come to the venue just to meet and take the blessings of these renunciates, almost



all of whom congregate believing in the spiritual merit for attending this traditional gathering.

Thus in the Ocean of the mind, one has to analyze Life with deep contemplation, undertake a *manthan*, with the mind (mana) also being determined and steadfast like the Mandāra mountain. Placed on Faith, the Kurma of Vishnu, a steadfast mind like the Mandāra mountain will analyze, swaying this way or that and find its own solutions. Many positive and some negative results will emerge, like the Ratnas, leading to the ultimate secret of Life, the drops of nectar. The path of Spiritual progress is not easy however, and will require great courage and fortitude, to face and overcome the difficulties like the poisonous fumes that will test your perseverance. As in any large enterprise meant for the greater good, some Shiva needs to hold the poison at bay, so realize Him within to become like Shiva. Many attractions will accrue as a byproduct of the toils, but do not get sidetracked by them. Take what comes naturally, or offer it to the deserving. Just avoid the negativities, and accept what accrues without losing sight of your goal—*amrita*, the secret of Life. Remember to keep Faith intact, and value forever the Eternal Self within. Repeatedly remember this event so as never again to become arrogant like Indra.

More about interpretations in the sixth section. This first chapter introduces the story and some historical aspects. The second essay is a classic on the idea of Pilgrimage and Festivals in the Hindu value system. Written by the Late savant Pandit Vidyaniwas Misra in his book *Hindu dharma: Jeevan mein sanatan ki khoj*, it has been excerpted from *The Hindu Way, a Search for the eternal*, as translated by the editor. The third essay deals with astrological implications as recorded by scholar-astrologer Prof Ramnaresh Tripathi. The last chapters try to give a summary of the available Puranic and Epic literature with excerpts on the subject for those inclined to seek original sources. These have been profusely interpreted in all languages and literatures of India. One may see many interpretations in Indian Art, Craft objects as well as in folk languages and literatures including various oral traditions of song



and stories. Those could be the subject of another book of illustrations altogether.

For ease of reading, only one diacritical mark of the long sounding vowel 'ā' has been used in most of the book. The second section by Prof Vidyaniwasji Misra has been excerpted here along with all the diacritical marks of the original, from the book *The Hindu way: A search for the Eternal*, published by Shubhi earlier. In this book we have tried to throw some light on the ritual, spiritual as well as the practical aspects of attending the *Melā*. We hope the book will be useful for both the culturally curious as well as the practical traveller.

Mahashivarātri 2016
Editor.





**PILGRIMAGE CENTERS
AND FESTIVALS**

Vidyaniwas Mishra

Pilgrimage & Festivals

Many people feel that the number of pilgrimage centers and festivals is inordinately high in the Hindu religion, so much so that one can find a pilgrim center in every place, and a festival every day. Should one then spend one's life roaming the pilgrimage centers? Will not this enthusiasm of continuously celebrating festivals wear out? Does not excessive importance given to centers of pilgrimage give rise to some kind of a system of exploitation? Isn't there a selfish interest behind these celebrations? These queries have been raised often, and not just in modern times. In Buddhist literature, the word *tairthik*, meaning one who habitually goes on pilgrimages, is considered derogatory. Kabir had denounced the system. It has been said in the Mahabharata, "All rivers are the Saraswati, all mountains are merit giving. O Jājali, the Self itself is the Center of Pilgrimage; why do you roam the kingdoms and beyond in vain, becoming a guest everywhere?"¹

In spite of this, the birthplace, workplace and place of Nirvāna of Buddha and Kabir have become Pilgrimage centers themselves. The protagonist of the Mahābhārata undertakes many pilgrimages; Rama, the hero of the Rāmāyaṇa, worshipped the existing centers, and wherever he went the place subsequently became a center of pilgrimage. Knower of the Self, Ādi Shankarācārya, had immersed himself in the pilgrim center of the Self, 'in which the waters of control are waves, and the rivers of truth flow in; the shores that hold it together is discipline, and the waves that arise in them are those of concern and generosity to others'². He did not purify his Self by the waters, yet he established the four major pilgrim centers (*chārdhām*).

It seems then that the concept of undertaking pilgrimages is deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.

Similarly, although all those moments are pure in which one makes a good decision, even then, in the flow of Time, some moments are very dear to us. The birthday of a loved one is a day of excitement, and Hindu



is a religion that does not give its love only to personalities; it also loves Nature. Shakuntala celebrates when a plant in her hermitage blooms; for the Hindu the sun, moon and stars, the rivers, mountains and seas, the animals, birds and vegetation are all dearly connected relatives, everyone's joy is his joy. So when he celebrates so many festivals, it must be taken as a proof of his innate enthusiasm for this connected and shared feeling.

Let us first talk about the centers of Pilgrimage, the '*tīrtha*'. One meaning of the word '*tīrtha*' is the place where it is easy to cross over the confluence or meeting of two rivers. People did cross with bridges, but the significance of that 'crossing' was considered equal to crossing with superficial knowledge alone. Crossing by a boat brings one still closer to the water, but crossing over by swimming or wading is experiencing the river and that indeed is the true crossing. We are then in the river, and the river is in us. This is why the Guru is also known as a '*Tīrtha*', the guru stays with you through the crossing, then you go across (still experiencing it first hand). He then helps another to cross. As soon as we connect with the Guru, we become associated with the practice of knowledge, and begin experiencing within ourselves the power to become a guru, to become a '*tīrtha*'.

Another meaning of '*tīrtha*' is waters, because most centers are either sources of rivers, or rivers or water tanks and pools, or forest areas full of waterfalls and rivers. Even today, the waters offered for prayers at temples, or in a holy attitude, are called '*tīrtha*'. In the island of Bali, the job of the *Gurupedanda* or priest consists mostly of sanctifying the water with mantra incantations, which is then taken home by the people to sprinkle during their spiritual acts. This water is also called '*tīrtha*'.

There are many reasons for water and rivers becoming so close to the Hindu. The first reason is that fire and water have had a major influence in the blossoming and evolution of its culture. The fire is considered the manifest deity while the waters are the unmanifest stage.³ If Fire is considered the forthcoming seedling of the creation, then Water is the



womb of this creation, and Yajña has been intrinsically associated with Water.⁴

The second reason is that the Hindu has seen the Word (Vāk) as Saraswati (one with flowing waters), having an ever-flowing power. The ever flowing dynamism of the river water, the flowing dynamism of language, and the ever flowing dynamics of dharma (religion), is seen focused in one drop of water.⁵ This is why just taking one drop of this water (*ācamana*) makes him pure.

The third reason is that his physical realities also make him look upon the river as a mother (who nourishes and sustains). The rivers have been fertilizing his crops. The land that has been tilled for thousands and thousands of years, have been renewed constantly due to the rivers. In the Ṛg Veda, many rivers have been remembered with fond attachment.

*‘Imam me gange yamune sarasvati śhutudri stomam rucatā parunṇayā,
Asikanya marudvṛdhe vitastayārjivīṣe ṣṇuhyā suṣomayā
Tuṣāmayā prathamam yātave sajuāh susartvā rasayā śvetyā tyā
Tvam Sindhu, kubhayā gomtiṃ krumum mehatnvā saratham yābhirīyase.
(Rg, 10/75/5-6)*

The very name of this country was after the river Sindhu, and those who gave us this name later, were also referring to the river Sindhu. The Hindus held many sessions of yajñas (seminars) at various places on the banks of the Sarasvati River. It was in these sessions that the thought contained in the Upanishads developed over time.⁶

Later the place of these seminar sessions were taken over by the āśramas, and people would go repeatedly to river banks or sources and confluences with the hope that they may get inspiration for a spiritual life from these places. They came in the hope of getting pure ideas and from the pure-minded dwellers of such places. In the Puraṇas these places were eulogized outlining peculiarities of the land, the qualities of the water, and the reason why the ascetics (*muni-ṛṣi*) revelled in it.⁷



The beauty of Nature had always attracted the Hindu. It appeared to him as the beauty of his own life, which is why he saw the Himalayas as epitomizing the gods. He saw the rivers as goddesses, the forests as merit-giving abodes. Out of these, he considered those places even more significant and lovable, where the ancestors had practiced ascetism, where the ascetic thinkers traditionally assembled regularly from time to time, and where problems of religion were regularly solved, thereby the body of the *dharma* was regularly polished (reinterpreted) within the larger framework of Place and Time.

Travelling to centers of Pilgrimage seems like a very easy prescription for scoring meritorious dharma points, but we must imagine the kind of travel involved a hundred and fifty years ago. Then it was considered a sin if the was undertaken even by bullock cart. One had to do it on foot. The person who resolved to undertake the holy journey (*yātrā*) would take leave of his home and dear ones forever (as he might not return) and because of this he would wear a saffron garb (to indicate this renouncement). Only such a person was allowed to proceed on this journey that had already fulfilled his duties; the one who had not paid the three debts (to ancestors, family, guests, teachers etc) would not accrue any merit from the undertaking.⁸

Then again, the one who undertook the pilgrimage would consider himself free of caste barriers, becoming one with the Universal Self (*sarvabhūtātma*), which is why it is not right (*adharma*) to ask about anyone's caste details in a place of pilgrimage. Going on a pilgrimage signifies in a way, the transcendence of the dimensions of Time and moving into Space. It is a condition when a person does not keep looking at the watch all the time; he must then perceive the entire space around and relate to what he sees.

The concept of nationality seems to me a little limiting than this one of becoming one with the Country. In the mindset of 'nationality' a person will think that this landmass that is spread from Assam to Rajasthan, from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, is our nation. In identifying with the country while looking at it in the spirit of Pilgrimage, we feel that we



belong to these natural rivers, the mountains, the forests, the seas and the sources of water. We look at them and recognize and know ourselves better. When we touch them, we become immortal because at the moment of contacting them we are touching the caress of thousands of years. It is the touch of our very own people, of the unbroken stream of our ancestors.

A pilgrimage is not an instance of travelling for pleasure, or having a picnic, or running away from one's responsibilities. There is an injunction to undertake a vow before proceeding for a pilgrimage, and while staying in a place of pilgrimage, to follow the rules thereof. In the *Kumbha* fair at Prayāg held in the coldest month of *Māgh*, rich and poor alike sleep on the floor with a bunch of hay spread underneath. The pilgrims eat only once a day, and bathe in the river very early in the morning, even though it is winter. The idea behind this was that when one comes to a place of pilgrimage, one must come as a common person leaving behind one's special status at home.

Now, taking advantage of this situation, if some people add to the miseries of the pilgrims, then the pilgrim center or the injunctions of the undertaking cannot be faulted. This is the fault of the management, who speak of equality as a slogan, but do not make any arrangements for putting it into practice. They take a tax from the people, but do not arrange for the successful running of such a huge undertaking. They make beautiful hotels and lodges for tourists, but it seems that making a simple shaded place of rest for the masses, and arrangements for their basic needs, would make a dent in their professed secularism. Sure, they worry even then, but only for the special official visitors. That the Minister and the Officers can have their bath in comfort, avoiding the rush of the crowd, seems to be the decisive factor in evaluating the successful execution of their duties.

Whether it is Kāshi, Vrindāvana, Ayodhyā, Tirupati, Rameśwaram or Puri, wherever you go, it seems that there is arrangement for those with ample means, but no arrangement for those without. There should



be no such distinction in the pilgrim centers at least. It does not seem to occur to anyone that the well to do must also go through similar hardships when on pilgrimage, and the less fortunate must also find humane treatment. There is a very famous trust at a famous pilgrim center. I spoke to their officials that they were making shops and guest houses of international standard, but since the average person comes for pilgrimage, should they not provide for clean community bath houses etc? Why were they turning it into a tourist complex? Their reply was that there will be more profit from the tourists, and publicity outside, and if there is no income, how will we arrange for the daily expenses for the temple? When I find that by giving a particular amount of fees, one can get a privileged viewing (*darshan*) easily, then I feel that the few places where a human being could feel equal to all, that there is no one big or small here, are being taken away from us.

Whatever has been said about the static places of pilgrimage can also be said of the mobile ones. (Eminent holy men are considered mobile pilgrim centers). Most 'Bābās' are also inclined towards the well to do or the powerful; there are only a few that give importance to the pure in heart or the genuine seekers. The result is that it seems the entire country is gaga over shortcuts to success. The importance of the Bābā or the temple seems restricted to exercises in possible wish fulfillment only. Those who abhor these unwholesome practices, criticize the pilgrim centers. Kashi, Prayag, Gaya, Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Puri, Kamakhya, Kanchi, Tirupati, Kanya Kumari are problems for them. How much filth, what sinful activities, what exploitation of the poor and simple folk, what horrendous crowds, what an unmanageable stream of people is coming this way and what a state of chaos! But is this the fault of the spirit of the pilgrim centers or is it the fault of the absence of that spirit? Can these folks not understand that the true spirit of pilgrimage is a voluntary letting go, a voluntary abandonment, of becoming a pauper, of the dying of the special ego and of living as a common person? It is the sense of washing away one's impurities, while presuming everyone to be good and pure; it is having a sense of gratitude to the world, it is an attempt to relate to the austerities of our



forbears, and of remembering their sacrifices. If they heard the songs of the women who sing for the pilgrimages, they would know which way this particular lot of pilgrims is heading. In the month of *Kārtik*, the song for ritual river bathing in the Bundelkhand area is:

Ā jāungi baḍe bhor dahi re le ke
(I will come with yoghurt, early in the morning
O Krishna, to be looted by you)

In the Awadh area the women going for the *kārtik* bath will be singing thus:

Raghubar sange jāb, hum na awadh mein rahabei
(We too will go with Rama to the forest; we will not remain in Avadh)

These songs go to show what a sublime sense of determination and unity is inculcated by the pilgrimage, what an intelligent decision it is to sacrifice the lesser pleasure for the greater one. Hindu dharma does not reside in those who open shop in the name of dharma. It resides in the sea of the multitudes that swim together in the experience of the pilgrim center, in those who truly savor the bliss of life. No one will speak the untruth while standing in the holy pilgrim center, or in the River *Ganga*; some may think this to be a blind superstition, but one does not feel like dismissing lightly such an attitude that inculcates such a strong relationship with Truth.

Whether the waters of the river Ganges contain certain chemical properties or not, or whether those that were there are vanishing due to technical superstitions or not is a matter for environmentalists to decide. However, do not the waters of the Ganges or any other pilgrim center contain the subtle energy of the deep and concentrated form of pure feelings of an infinite number of people? Has not Man, the creator of so many wonders, been radiating the power of his mind here, by associating with these waters, so much so that anyone else associating with it will be able to purify even the dirtiest of minds? And yes, if the spirit of the pilgrimages had remained with us then we would not have become as lustreless as a people as we have now become. Our



rivers have been reduced, our lakes have disappeared, our mountains are being denuded and silence does not reign any longer in our forests due to the incessant sharp beat of the axe. The rivers are being clogged by technical-industrial garbage. The greed of man is eating up Beauty, both of himself and of Nature.

We made the difficult pilgrimages easier to reach because we did not retain the spirit of the pilgrimage, we have taken away the sense of adventure from the difficult journeys we used to undertake, we have invaded the purity of these places with the left over trash from the picnic spirit. Thirty years ago from now, no one could have used soap while bathing in Kashi or Prayag, today every *ghāt* (paved bank for bathing) has become a washer man's bank (*dhobighāt*), the result being that a layer of soap lies over the surface of the waters, and one can see the residual oily layer floating on it.

The Hindu had seen the purity of his environment as a source of his own Purity. This is why he had considered it a sin to cut a green tree, and a meritorious deed to construct a reservoir. He valued the walking up to the peaks of Badri and Kedar as more meritorious; he respected the power of the forest as a balancing factor to the artificiality of the city. Today there is no spirit of pilgrimage remaining, consumerism rules instead, Kashi and Vrindaban do not remain pilgrim centers, but have become centers of attraction for tourists. The larger purpose of the Pilgrimage has thus been reduced to a weapon for nationalism.

The true purpose of the pilgrimage is not achieved by just undertaking the journey or bathing in the waters or performing the rituals to ancestors or donating profusely. It is fulfilled by giving up the sense of Self (how much a person can give up his individual self to float with the larger stream of humanity), it is fulfilled by a certain enthusiasm in which everyone else also seems pure, those others who bathe with you, the waters in which you bathe and that other person's breath, everything. This is why the injunction of pilgrimage is also given for the purpose of atonement of past misdeeds because the experience of this



journey also destroys the ego. The sin of ego is also destroyed along with the endeavor. The stringent discipline observed in the undertaking of the pilgrimage purifies both the mind and the body. The injunction of pilgrimage is also given for the purpose of paying tribute to ancestors because in the pilgrim center the person can relate to the austerities of the ancestors and is able to then pay respects to them by associating with that austere self denial (*tapah*). A pilgrimage is therefore a kind of a yajña of the Self.

The pilgrim centers thus became the centers of Hindu culture. Some became centers for Knowledge and Art like Kashi, Mathura, Kanchi and Ujjaini. Some became centers of special festivals of roaming mendicants, where they would gather on certain festivals, like Prayag, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. The Kumbha fair gathers every twelve years in these centers. Some are established as permanent playfields of Deities, like those related to Rama, Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Panchvati and Rameshwaram, and those associated with Sri Krishna, like Mathura Vrindaban, Kurushetra, Dwarka and Ujjaini (where he studied). Also those associated with Buddha are Lumbini, Gaya, Sarnath and Kusinagar; those with Adi Shankaracharya are, Kaldi (birthplace) Omkareshwar (initiation) Kashi, Badrikāshram and all four centers-(that he reestablished as the four pillars of Hindu dharma), the Shankaracharya Giri (where he was felicitated for his eminence in scholarship), and centers associated with other saints and scholars like Pandharpur, Udupi, Nabadweep, Puri, Vrindaban, Nanakana sahib etc. and some other centers of pilgrimage famous as abodes of Shiva and Shakti. There is a long list of these.⁹ This long list tells us two things, one that there is a potentiality in every place to become a pilgrim center, and secondly that the place purified with any special presence becomes very significant, because that Presence remains embedded in every atom of that place in some way or the other.

Liberation and washing away of past sins is a smaller goal. That in Vrindaban, the play of Krishna is held continuously; in Chitrakut Rama is perennially resides as a forest dweller; the Energy of the Mother



goddess is daily emanating at Kamakhya, Shiva continues to roam Kashi, Nara and Narayana continue their austere meditation in Kedar and Badrikashram, this kind of experience is the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage. The belief that one who dies in Kashi will be liberated, or that by drinking Ganges water at the time of death, or that immersing the remains in the Ganga will give liberation, all mean just one thing, that the fulfillment of Life lies in being in a flow, in existing for others as one would in a pilgrim center.

Thus a journey undertaken for pilgrimage is not the end of the journey of life, nor is it the end of *Dharma*, it is the renewal of the determination to live righteously in dharma. That is why there will be new pilgrim centers, new feelings will get associated with old centers, new centers will crop up, old centers will vanish, but the need for going on a pilgrimage will remain intact as long as there is a desire for transcendence. The places associated with Sant Kabir and Maharishi Dayanand are pilgrim centers today. Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram will become a pilgrim center if it is not already one today

It is important that arrangements are made to preserve the dignity of pilgrim centers. Arrangements should be made for the training and service of the priests in these centers. Arrangements should be made for the stay and hygiene of the average pilgrim in such a way that is available to all. The accommodation that is available with the priests of these centers (which they make available for the pilgrims) should be maintained and cleaned by the state. The secularism of a democratic nation does not mean that arrangements made for fulfillment of religious aspirations of the majority of the population should be limited to maintaining law and order and hygiene.

Now we come to the festivals. If pilgrimages are the visible image of continuity in space then festivals are continuity in Time. To see the seasons change, to recognize its shades, to experience the effect of those shades within, and to measure the passage of Time under the open skies, in a non-mechanical and experiential way, is prescribed in



the practice of Hindu way of Life. For him, the sunrise, the Noon and the sunset are the three steps of Vishnu. The annual wheel is the wheel of life. The meaning of the word *samvatsar* is benevolent (*vatsal*), the meaning of '*varsha*' is the one that rains. Year following year is the fulfillment of auspiciousness, it is the fulfillment of life, it is the rain. The literal meaning of '*parva*' (festival) is knot (or phalange of the finger). As the bamboo grows it leaves behind the knotted joint, thus *parva* is a measure of growth, it is also the conjunction between one phase and another, it situates itself between the two phases in order to relate them. If the sugarcane does not have those joints, it would not be able to preserve enough juice.

The Hindu concept of Time conceives it as both with and without duration, it finds it possible to see it both as fragmented as well as on a continuum. He sees the festival or *parva* as the binding force or connector between these opposite views of Time. At the declaration of intent before a formal worship, he acknowledges both continuous and durational Time; he connects himself to the first moment of Creation as well as to the present count of Time up to the moment. This is why the festival has a preordained Time and this is also why it is held repeatedly.

The Hindu Festival is usually a celebration. Etymologically the word '*utsav*' arises from '*savana*', which was the word for the pressing of the Soma juice at the Vedic yajña ceremonies. When that juice swells over flowing in plenty, it is an *utsavan* or *utsava*. In the Hindu festival therefore, both the fulfilling and over brimming of joy are indicated. It is like the Full moon in the month of Kartika, when the ambrosia of the Moon is said to be over flowing. The overwhelming joy of a sensitive Hindu celebrating a festival is somewhat similar. Just as among holy places, some places are considered specially endowed even so some holy moments of Time are considered especially holy compared to others. The Hindu religion prefers to celebrate birthdays; there are no festivals on the days of the passing away of Rama or Krishna. The death anniversary of the father is observed, but that is on a personal level, and is done before the celebratory oblations to forefathers. It is not



a festival. The celebratory *shrāddha* ceremony emphasizes the joy of relating to the manes; every incantation of the ceremony generates a feeling of contentment and self-empowerment.

Many festivals are related to voluntary self-control or *vrata* (though now-a-days most of the emphasis has shifted to food restrictions or change in food patterns), and even that control attempts to tell the performer to restrain both the mind and the body from external indulgences, to make oneself the object of sacrifice and then become a partaker of ambrosia, and to fill the emptiness with that ambrosia.

Both the full moon and the new moon days are considered very important right from the Vedic times because on the new moon, the moon is completely swallowed by the shadow of the Sun, and on the Full moon night it is completely fulfilled. This physical phenomenon is actually the Soma yāga, the Soma (moon) being sacrificed into the fire (sun), the swelling of the Fire, and subsequently , the phase by phase birthing or increasing of the moon. Ananda Coomaraswamy¹⁰ has explained this phenomenon in this way that in the night of mating, Soma (Moon) is overwhelmed or swallowed (*nigīrṇa*) by Āditya (Sun), and when overwhelmed, it is called the Āditya and becomes the Āditaya. Just as the Sun thus internalizes the dawn each day, and the moon each month, and it can be perceived, so also this divine marriage takes place within you, when Sun and moon in the right and left eyes enter the cave of the heart to become one. In the Vedic age the new moon (*darsh*) and the full moon (*Paurṇamāsa*) were the two main yajñās. They were the prototypes of all sacrifices.

The *Makar Sankrānti* (January 14th) is the primary festival related to the junction of external Time. This date is celebrated everywhere in India. In Assam it is known as *Bhogali Bihu*, in Bengal as *Paṣṣa parvan*, in the South as *Pongal*, in the North as *Khichri* or *Makar Sankrānti*. It is celebrated with ritual bathing, giving alms and the offering of the new harvest of rice.



The Sun's entry into Aries is also important because it is the juncture of the spring season. In some provinces it is the beginning of the rains, and in north India it is the indication of the advent of the austere heat of summer. In this festival freshly harvested cereals are roasted and crushed, and they are taken with the new raw mangoes that have just begun to blossom.

The Sun's entry in to Virgo is a festival for the manes, so in the dark fortnight of the month of Āświna the forefathers are remembered and their rites performed. Āświna and *Chaitra* are months when days and nights become of equal lengths. These then are appropriate months for the invocation of *Shakti* or the mother Goddess, the goddess of strength and power, since there is a balance between internal and external Time. This is why in both these months the festivals of the Mother Goddess are celebrated. Agriculturally, these nine (*navarātri*) day festivals in autumn (*shārādiya*) and spring (*vāsantik*) are significant timings for the ripening of crops, so they are days of enthusiasm for the farmers. The expression of gratitude and humility towards the mother goddess joins with this enthusiasm to enhance meaningfully their power of action.

The dates or *tithis* are regulated according to the waxing and waning of the moon.

With regard to worship, and performance of rituals, the date assignation is done according to this lunar calendar in the entire Hindu system, as well as in Bali, Thailand, and Laos. In fact almost all of South and Southeast Asia follow this system. Islam also gives importance to the lunar dates. The only difference is that in Islam there is no provision for balance between the Solar and Lunar calendars being effected by the introduction of an additional thirty-fifth month (the *launda* or extra lunar month) as in the Hindu one. The Hindu calculation combines and balances both Solar and Lunar calendars. In the Vedas, the Moon has been associated with the mind of the Cosmic Man (*Virāt Puruṣa*). The Moon is connected with mystical secrets, the constant effort needed



to know it, and the resulting ambrosia of delight begotten from it, therefore Hindu rituals expect a touch of the blissful aspect of the Moon even though they are oriented to worship the Sun. Two first dates (*pratipadā*) of the lunar fortnights in the year are festive occasions; the first day of the bright half of the month of Kartik is celebrated as the worship of *annakūta* when the tradesmen have their financial new year, and the first day of the bright half of the month of *Chaitra*, which is considered the beginning of the rainy season. Two second dates (*dvitīyā*) of the lunar calendar celebrated as festivals are the *Bhātṛi dvitīyā* (or the brothers' day) in the Bright half of the month of *Kārtika* and the *Rathayātrā*, in the bright half of the month of *Āsāḍha* when the chariot of Lord Jagganāth is taken out from the temple and the moving idol (*chalamurti*) undertakes a ritual journey). There are three important third (*tritīyā*) dates of the lunar calendar in the year, celebrated as important festivals; the third day of the bright half of the month of *Vaisākh* is considered the beginning date of the first of the four aeons in Time- the *satya* or the *Kṛta Yuga*, then in the month of *Bhādra*, the third day of the bright half of the moon (*hartālika teej*), comes the fast of married women for continued marital bliss, and in the bright half of the month of *Shrāvana* comes *Shrāvani teej*, another festival only for women.

Similarly, three important fourth dates (*Chaturthi*) of the lunar calendar are celebrated in the months of *Bhadrapada* and *Māgh*, both in the dark halves of the moon, and one in the month of *Kārtika*. These are in honor of Ganesha, with the one celebrated in Maharashtra in *Bhādra* is very specially celebrated with much pomp and splendor. The one in the dark half of *Kārtika* is known as *Sankatā chaturthi* and is also primarily a women's fast. Four fifth dates of bright fortnight of the moon (*pañcamī*) are important in the year; *shrāvaṇa shukla pañcamī*, *nāgapancamī*, *mārgśiṣa shukla pañcamī*, and *māgha shukla pañcamī* or *vasanta pañcamī* the day of Saraswati, the goddess of learning and Arts, and *bhādrapada shukla pañcamī* or *Ṛṣi pañcamī* (also *vihār pañcamī* in *vrindāvana*, and *jānaki vivāha pañcamī* in *Avadh* and *Mithila* centers).



Of the sixth day of the moon, the four festive ones are in the months of *āsādh* (*skandaśaṣṭhī*) in the bright half, in *bhādrapada* (*halaśaṣṭhī*) for sons (*putravrata*) held in the dark fortnight, *bhādrapada śukla* (*suryaśaṣṭhī*) in the bright half in honor of the Sun, and in *kartika* (bright half) also in honor of the Sun.

One seventh day (*saptamī*) of the lunar fortnight is celebrated separately as *acalā saptamī*, in the month of *māgha* during the bright fortnight of the moon. Three festivals celebrated on the eighth day of the moon (*aṣṭamī*) are *Kṛṣṇa janamāṣṭamī* in the dark fortnight of the month of *Bhādra*, *Radhāṣamī* in the bright half of the month of *Bhādrapada*, and *Gopāṣamī* in the bright fortnight of the month of *Kārtika*.

The two *navamī* or ninth dates of the lunar fortnight are festivals celebrating the birth days of Rama and Sita, both held in the bright halves of *Chaitra* and *Vaisākha* respectively. Two tenth days (*daśamī*) are significant, one in the lunar month of *Aśvin* (*Vijayā daśamī*) and the other in *jyeṣṭha* (*gangā daśahara*), both in the bright fortnight.

All eleventh days (*ekadaśī*) of the lunar fortnight have some festival or the other. Of special import are *devotthāna ekādaśī* in the brighter half of the month of *Kartika*, *Rangbhārī ekādaśī* in the bright half of the month of *Phālguna*, and *Bhimsenī ekādaśī* in the bright half of *Jyeṣṭha*. The twelfth dates of the bright half of *Bhādra* is celebrated as *vāmanadvadaśī*. Three of the fourteenth dates of the lunar fortnights (*caturdaśī*) are important, viz. *naraka caturdaśī* in the dark half of *Kārtika*, *Mahāśhivarātri* in the dark half of *Phālguna*, and *Ananta caturdaśī* in the bright half of *Bhādrapada*.

Three New Moons days (*Amāvasya*) in dark fortnights of the moon are important festive occasions, *Mahālayā* in *Aświn*, *Deepawali* in *Kārtika*, and *Maunī amāvasya* in *Magha*. Six of all the Full moon days in the year are important. (*Vaisākhi* in the month of *Vaisakh*, *Vyās pūrṇimā* in *Āsādh*, *Rakṣābandhan* in *Srāvaṇa*, *Sharad pūrṇimā* in *Āświn*, *Kārtika pūrṇimā*, *Māgh pūrṇimā*, and *Phālgun pūrṇimā*).



Usually the new moon and full moon days involve festivals with ritual bathing in rivers or lakes, especially the full moon days falling in the months of *Kārtika*, *Māgh* and *Vaisakh* and those full moon days on which there falls a lunar eclipse or those new moon days on which there is a solar eclipse. All eighth, ninth and fourteenth dates of the lunar cycle are days of worship of the mother goddess. Dark nights of the eighth day of the lunar fortnight are considered particularly auspicious due to the belief regarding it being the time of the emanation of the energy from the Mother Goddess. All eleventh days (*ekādaśī*) are considered dear to *Viṣṇu* but the ritual fast on the dark nights of the moon are undertaken mostly by renunciate monks only. All thirteenth days (especially of the dark fortnight) are considered favorites of Shiva, The worshippers of Shiva observe the *pradoṣha* fast on these days. Apart from these, the sixth day of the fortnight is considered dear to the gods *Skanda* and *Sūrya* (Sun), and the fourth day is a favorite of *Ganeṣa*.

The most popular festivals are of two kinds, firstly those associated with the incarnations like *Kṛṣṇa Janamāṣṭamī* and *Srīrāmanavamī* and secondly the common festivals like *Deepāvalī*, *Holī*, *Daśerra* (*Vijayādaśami*) and *Rakṣābandhan*. There is a third type, related to the fasts or days of temperance (*vrata*), like the *Devotthāna Ekādaśī* or *Mahā Śivarātri*. Although *Janamāṣṭamī*, *Rāmanavamī* etc are also days of fasting but in those festivals there is collective festivity and celebration along with the fast, not a celebration at the individual level. The birth dates of many saints and preceptors are also celebrated as holy dates.

Every region, again, has its own special fasts and festivities. In Bengal, it is the *Durgā Pūjā* in the ten days of the month of *Āśvin*, in Assam it is the *Māghī Bihu*, all over India it is the *Makar sankrānti* and *Deepāvalī*, in Northern India it is *Holī*, in Rajasthan it is *Ganagaur*, in Maharashtra it is the *Srī Ganeshotsava*, in Kerala it is *Onam*, in Orissa the journey of The Chariot (*Rathayātrā*) in the month of *Āṣāḍh*, in Punjab it is the *Vasiākhī*, and in all areas, the festivals of the birth of Krishna and Rama. In many states the *Vijaya daśami* is celebrated with great fervor, more as the battle victory of Rama.



The festival of Holi is a converted from of the three day *madanotsava* celebrated in ancient times. It is a festival of colors, of music and of the advent of Spring, and of adjusting ourselves to this annual season. In many countries the season before rain is one of an ecstatic expectation. The Indian spring is a pretty longish season, since every tree has its own springtime, but the first official announcement of spring is by the mango trees bloom and attracted by their scent the Indian cuckoo (*kokila*) coos in tandem. Almost the entire month of *phālgun* (Feb-March) is one of exhilaration. Recently the meaning of exhilaration has changed a bit and this festival has become slightly offensive in the cities. However in the villages, though the overtones of romantic love are pronounced, the love is simple and natural and Holi is not played to offend anyone. Holi is in a way the funerary burning of the past year, and preparing to welcome the new year after anointing oneself with the ashes of that pyre. It is a catharsis of all sensual pleasures, but with the intention of stocking up on social benevolence, therefore Holi is not just a festival where men and women tease each other, but they also play Holi with their favorite deities like Krishna, Shiva and Rama. There is an intention of inundating them (the deities) with love and color, so that all songs and all activities of drenching with color, become automatically impersonal.

Deepawali or Deewali is a festival of lamps, and a festival for worshipping Lakshmi and a festival of worshipping Kali as well, but is mainly a festival of lights. Every corner of the house needs to be cleaned, spruced up and painted, and every corner lit with lamps arranged carefully synchronized in rhythm by one's own hands. It is the lighting of lamps from the roof to the entrance of the house, cascading lights to welcome with open doors, the Deity of Auspiciousness (*Sridevi*) personified. All this has one significance mainly, that of affirming the human ability to fight the forces of darkness, to fight it on the basis of a human effort, and to destroy the inner and outer encumbrances that hold on to the darkness. This festival is celebrated after the one of Vijayā Daśamī, the celebration on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Āswīn, the day of Rama's victory over Ravana. Exactly after twenty



days of that, the return of Rama to Ajodhya is celebrated by lighting up every house in the city to celebrate Rama's coronation. In Bengal this is the day of the worship of *Kālī* because she is the annihilator of all inauspiciousness.

Janamāṣami and *Rāmanavamī* are two festivals celebrating the birthdates of the two major *avatāras*, or descendance. The Hindu does not exactly celebrate birthdays on these days, he does not cut cakes; he experiences and relives the appearance of Krishna on the dark midnight of the month of *Bhādra*, he waits for His descendance. On the *Ramnavami* day, Rama's birth 'happens' in every household, exactly at noon, and every house becomes Ajodhya. Krishna takes birth in the middle of the night to steal every Hindu heart, while Sri Rama appears at the clearly lit noon to remind him of his duties. The meaning of loving Krishna is to let go of oneself completely into the flow of perennial beauty. To walk with Rama means to accept exile for the sake of Truth, and to accept the journey into the forest with him. The very taste of Life lies in this all-destroying love, in this very journey into the forest. The Hindu feels comfortable following them because he thinks whether or not these deities do something for him, their consorts or powers (*shakti*) will definitely help him.

Shiva and the members of his family deities have a different type of attraction and importance for the Hindu mind. The entire imaginative fertility of the Hindu mind went into the making of the imagery of Shiva, Pārvati, Gaṇeṣa and Skanda. Along with Shiva were associated all anomalies, all knowledge systems, all Arts, all pleasures as well as the abandoning of all pleasures, riches and beggary, daily *yoga* (abstinence) and daily *bhoga* (indulgence), all these opposing ideas have adhered. He is the One who can be pleased easily (*āśutoṣa*). Even if you give him poison with Love, he will accept it happily. Pārvatī the daughter of the Himālayas, has bought over Shiva with her penances. Even more than Shiva, she is the nourisher of the beggars and disembodied spirits who are the hangers on of Shiva. However, most of all, she is the goddess of female auspiciousness (*saubhāghya*). The Hindu women worship



her so that the domain of the home remains entirely their own, like that of Gauri. The husband (like Shiva) can appear to remain confused, but he should be contented to give her all his earnings. And yes, he should not abandon her side at any moment of time. Of the sons, one should be very powerful, like (*Kārtikeya*) the commander of the army of the gods, the other (like Ganesha) extremely intelligent, and both begetting public respect with ease. To be a Hindu is to be a devotee of Shiva because only by worshipping Shiva can one gain common worldly benefits, as well as special abilities (*vibhūti*). He is also the bestower of liberation. When adversities appear, his ideal helps to keep them in control without affecting one's life totally, as Shiva keeps the poison near the throat, without imbibing it any further. If ambrosia is available then it reaches the cerebral lotus of *sahsrāra*- the ultimate chakra. After all, it is Shiva who teaches how to combine Art and Yoga.

This is why there is a great liveliness associated with the festivals involving Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha or Skanda. The *Mahāśivarātri* is a night of Dance and Music. Festivals connected with this family whether it be *Gaurivrata*, *Hartālikā teej* or the *Gaṇagaur* in Rajasthan, or the *Skanda Mahotsava* in the South, or the *Ganeshotsava* in Maharashtra, or the *Jagaddhātri Pooja* , are all occasions of joy, beauty, auspiciousness and enthusiasm.

The folk literature of Hindus make Shiva and Parvati roam the villages and all the homes, while enjoying jokes with Parvati at the expense of Shiva, making fun of the eccentricities of Shiva, because the Hindu almost considers himself a member of this family. How can the fear of ghosts and evil spirits ever engulf him (they are the army of Shiva), and so how can his past forgettable history ever rule his intellect? Of course, what moves with him (and through him), whether it is Krishna or Rama or Shiva and Parvati, is constantly fluid, and his fluidity comes from this constant dynamicity and is therefore always renewed.

Hindu festivals are therefore celebrations of the repeated over brimming of a perennial Life of Faith.



Both Holy places and Holy festivals are intended to awaken as well as overcome Time and Space. In a pilgrimage the person recognizes more of his country on the one hand, while becoming free of it on the other; because while recognizing the diversity, the vastness of his country, and while recognizing its possibilities and its history, he realizes that the Country has become an entity within himself. Then wherever he may be physically living, the Ganges flows within him.

Similarly, while celebrating festivals the year round he looks minutely at the minute divisions of time. While delving into the various sections of daily time segments, watching the turning of the seasons, and emptying and refilling himself in the celebration of festivals associated with each such juncture, he begins to enjoy the infinite repetitions of duration. (It is as if) somewhere inside him *Mahākāl* (Shiva as Time) and *Cinnamastā* (female deity holding her severed head in her own hands) begin to dance in rhythm with his consciousness. He himself becomes *Chinnamastā* by severing off his ego himself; he becomes *Nilkanha* (Shiva) by consuming the poison of his age and holding it in abeyance.

The Hindu divisions of Time go into such fine detail that the day is not divided into twenty four, but sixty *ghatikas*. The changing of dates are not related to twenty-four hour segments, but to something between 52 and 60 *ghatis*, a few *palas*, and *vipalas* (moments in time). His Space is also divided into minute units. It has so many local customs, so many village gods, so that the perception of unity in all of these is the inescapable conclusion. The Hindu way does not destroy diversity, it makes it meaningful instead. It takes various differences and gives them a unified direction; this is why the Hindu religion is in itself a perennial pilgrimage, a perennial festival.



Endnotes

- ¹ Sarvā nadyaha sarasvatyahasarve
puṇyāha śiloccayāha,
Jājale tīrthamātmaiva mā sma
deshātithirbhava.
Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva, 263/42-43
- ² Ātmā nadī samyamtoyapurnā
satyāvahā śīlataā dayormi,
Tatrābhiṣekam kuru pāṇḍuputra na
vārīṇā śudhyati cāntarātmā
Vāmana Purāṇa, 43.25
- ³ Chaudiyitrī sūnṛtānāmchetantī
sumatīnām. Yajña dadhe sarasvatī.
The inspirer of all right action, the
instigator of all good deeds, the
Sarasvatī holds the yajña.
R̥gveda, 1/3/11
- ⁴ Apsu snāti sākṣādeva dīkṣātapasī
avarundhe tīrthe snāti.
(he) bathes in the river, veritably
relates to initiation and austerity,
and takes a holy dip..
Taittirīya Saṁhitā, 6/1/1/1
- ⁵ Hiranyavarṇāha śucayahpāvakā yāsu
jātaha savitā yāsvagnih,
Yā agnim garbham dadhire
suvarṇastā na āpah saṁ syonā
bhavantu.
May this deity of the golden waters
be beneficial for us, the one in which
the Sun took birth, the one in which
Fire took birth, the one that is many
splendoured and of many hues, the
one that holds Fire (and therefore
yajña) in her womb.
AtharvaVeda, 1/33/1
- ⁶ (1) Ṛṣayoh vai sarasvatyām
satramāsata.
Eitereya Brāhmaṇa 8/1
(2) mādhyamāh sarasvatyām
satramāsta.
Śāṅkhāyana Brāhmaṇa, 12/3

- ⁷ Śarirasya yathoddeśāha śucayah
parikīrtitāh,
tathāpṛthivyā bhāgāśca puṇyāni
salilāni ca
parigrahācca sādhunām pṛthivyāśca
tejasā
atīva puṇyabhāgāste salilasya ca
tejasā.
Mahābhārata, Anuśāsanaparva,
108/16-18
 - ⁸ Yaha svadharmān parityajya
tīrthasevām karoti hi
Na tasya phalate tīrthamiha loke
paratra ca
Ṛṇāni trīṇyapākuryāt kurvan vā
tīrthsevanam
Kūrmapurāṇa, 9.47
 - ⁹ Main Pilgrim Centers
The ancestral (kulaparvata)
mountains.
Mahendro Malayah sayah
Shuktimān Ṛkṣaparvatah
Vindhyaśca pāriyātrasya saptaite
kulaparvatāha
Kūrma Purāṇa, 9.47
- The Seven Forests:
Kāmyaka vana, Aditi Vana, Vyāsa
vana, Phalākī vana, Sūrya vana,
Madhuvana, and Puṇyaśīta vana.
- The Seven Rivers:
1. Gange ca Yamune ca Godāvari
Sarasvatī,
Narmade Sindhu Kaveri Jaleasmin
sannidhim kuru.
2. Ganga- Yamuna (in the month
of Kartika), Narmadā (in Pauṣa),
Devikā (in Mārgaśīrṣa), Sannihitā
(in Māgha), Varuṇā (in Phālguna),
Sarasvatī (in Caitra), Chandrabhāgā
(in Vaiśākha). Kauśikī (in Jyēṣha)
Tāpikā (Tāpī in Āṣāḍha), Sindhu (in
Āṣāḍha), Gandaki-nārāyaṇī
(in Bhādrapada), Saryu (in



Āświna), and Godāvari (during lunar eclipse).

The Seven Cities:

Kāshi, Kānchi, Māya (Haridwar), Ayodhyā, Dvārikā, Mathurā, and Avantikā (Ujjain)

The Seven Regions (Kṣhetra):

Kurukṣetra, Hariharakṣetra (Sonepur-Bihar), Prabhāskṣetra (Somnātha, Gujarat), Reṇukākṣetra (near Mathura), Bhṛgukṣetra (near Bharoach, Gujarat), Puruṣottamakṣetra (Puri, Orissa), and Sukarakṣetra (Soroe Uttar Pradesh)

Twelve Jyotirlingas (Of Shiva)

Viśwanāth (Kashi), Vaidyanāth (Devaghar, Bihar), Rāmeśwara (Tamil Nadu, Mallikārjuna (SriŚaila, Andhra), Grishneśwara (near Elumā), Bheemashankar (Maharashtra), Trayambakeshwara (Nasik, Maharashtra), Omkāreśwara (Madhyapradesh), Mahākāl (Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh), Somanāth (Gujarat), and Kedārnāth (Uttarākhanda).

Primary Shaktipīthas (abodes of the Mother Goddess)

Kāmākṣī (Ranchi), Bhramarāmbā (Kerala), Kumārī (Kanyakumari), Ambāji (Gujarat), Mahālakṣmi (Kolhapur), Kālikā (Ujjain), Lalitā (alopidevi, Prayag), Vindhyavāsini (Vindhyāchal), Viśālākṣī (Varanasi), Mangalāvati (Gaya), Tripurasundarī (Bengal), Guhyakeśvarī (Nepal), Kāmākhyā (Assam), Śākambharī (near Saharanpur), Jwālāmukhī (Kangra).

The Four Dhāmas (main pilgrim abodes).

Badrināth, Dvārakāpurī, JagannāthPuri, and Rameṣvaram
Source (river) pilgrimages (Srota-tīrtha)

Gangottarī (Ganga), Yamunotarī (Yamuna), Gomukh (Ganga), Mānsarovar (Brahmaputra and Sindhu), Muktiśwarnath (Gandaki), Amarkantaka (Narmada), and Pancavatī (Godavari).

Main pilgrimage centers on Lakes (Sarovar tīrtha)

Puṣkara (Rajasthan), Kurukṣetra (Brahmsarovar). Chakratīrth (Naimisāranya), Jyotisara (where the Bhagwadgīta was preached, Amritsara, and Mānasī ganga (Goverdhan)

(Confluence or mouth of river pilgrim centers) Sangam tīrth , Sagartīrth.

Hariharkṣetra, Mahabalipuram, Gangasagar, Puri, Dhanuskoti, Prayag, Bhṛigukaccha, Kanyakumari and Gokarna.

Cave pilgrimages (Gufātīrtha):

Amarnāth, Vaiṣṇodevi, Vyāsgufā (near Badrinath).

Last rite centers Shrādha tīrtha:

Piśācmocana (kāśhī), Prayag, Gaya, Brahmakapāl (badrinath), Prithudaka (near Kurukṣetra), Bhṛgukaccha, Rāmeśvaram and Ābhās. 10

wear out Ananda Coomaraswamy, Hinduism and Buddhism, Op cit. p23-24







THE ASTROLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ramnaresh Tripathi

India is a land of Festivals. It could be said that Indian Culture itself is born from its Festivals. Festivals begin with the rites associated with the birth of a child and continue through other rites known as *Samskāras*. Purificatory rites become festivals to celebrate, for family, friends and neighbors, along with the agricultural and other seasonal festivals. However, the Kumbha is another type of recurring festival altogether.

From time immemorial this festival has been part and parcel of Life in India. It runs in their nerves and sinews. Their unbelievable Faith and devotion is veritably in the Ambrosia that will enrich their lives. Their belief is veritably in the indestructible *vata* tree which is not destroyed even at the end of the world. Their devotion and religious fervor is veritably in Prayāg, the confluence of the rivers Gangā and Yamunā, and the invisible Saraswati.

The Kumbh Mela is the confluence of the diverse yet united Culture of India. It is a flow of spiritual consciousness beyond par. It is a spontaneous expression of the ever flowing progression of the culture of river, forest and mountains and their oneness with humanity. It is a flow of this consciousness of the ascetics (Rishis) of Ancient India. It is a source of energy, and offers a totality of experience, of this life vs. the other, merits vs. sins, knowledge vs. ignorance, and darkness vs. light.

Melā means a meeting of people. It is a place where people assemble from far and wide, meet others of similar needs, and interests. Some may come just together the daily needs of living. These fairs must have become popular at times when conveyance was scarce, and one had to use the bullock cart, or horses, camels and water buffalos for transit purposes, or just travel by foot. Gradually as civilization developed, the Indians felt the need for buying things they could not produce themselves, in exchange of things they did have in surplus. This gave birth to the idea of a periodic *hāt* (fair) or a specified venue and time for such activities. However, as is typical of Indian culture, the occasion became a time for festivities as well, and soon they became recurring festivals. These *melas* or meeting places for selling and buying have a tradition of thousands of years. The villagers came to purchase cows for



milk, buffalos for agriculture, exchange new pots for old etc, and thus it became an economic need to hold these fairs, which are even now loosely known as cattle fairs.

However, the Kumbh Mela originated from a religious and spiritual consciousness; therefore spirituality is the nature of this *melā*. This *melā* is thereby different from those others. It is a festival of great importance where one comes to recharge oneself.

Ascetics and religious men of different denominations assemble here, and hold discussions and seminars on various topics of spiritual or religious interest. Householders of religious or spiritual inclination also assemble to benefit from such debate. Thus the meetings generate spiritual knowledge and a feel for renunciation of petty material interest. There is perhaps no better way of getting to know different knowledge systems that have prevailed in India, for this is a festival where the ascetics and the rest of India meet.

North, South East and West, People come from all directions. They are diverse in language, living methods and cultures, and thus they get an opportunity to meet each other amidst all their diversity and acknowledge this magnificent diversity. This gives rise to an acceptance of differences in language and culture. Thus the Kumbh and other religious as well as trade fairs, play a significant role in bringing the different peoples closer. Families come from all over Bhārat (India and abroad).

People of all castes and followers of any denomination of the Hindu way can participate in the Kumbh fair and one and all can take a dip in the river. The mythology related to the river Gangā indicates that it originally emerged from the feet of Vishnu. Similarly in the Purush Sookta, a declaration about the shudras emanating from the holy feet of Vishnu has been made. This makes them related to the most pure and purifying power of the Gangā. Gangā and Shudras become sister and brothers because both are born from the feet of Vishnu. Thus the Kumbh festival denounces any kind of discrimination, since the so



called lowly caste of Shudras have the same origin as the most holy of rivers, Gangā.

The eminent Yogi-King of Prayāg, His Holiness Devarāhā Baba used to say, 'Children, the so called Harijans are the brothers of Ganga, because they too have originated from the Feet of the Lord. This is a significant contribution to this phenomenon of the recurring Kumbh mela. It reminds us of this unity of all human beings.

This also is closely related to the field of counting Time, or the Science of *Jyotish* or Astrology. In fact astrology is the very basis for deciding the dates, places and auspicious time cycles of the various Kumbh gatherings that are held cyclically. Astrologically speaking, it is believed that the effect of the Sun and the Moon, when combined with the astronomical configuration of planets during the Kumbh, becomes ambrosia or the immortalizing nectar of the gods, but before we go into that it is important to understand the implications of the word Kumbh.

The word Kumbh means a pitcher or pot- which is considered a very auspicious symbol by itself, perhaps due to the mythology associated with it. Being the largest gathering of human beings on the planet, the 'Kumbh' fair has become well known all over the world. The Kumbh Melas or periodic spiritual fairs centered around the mythological significance of certain places, under certain astrological configurations.

Etymologically and hermeneutically speaking, the implications of the word Kumbh in Sanskrit, can be many. Its primary meaning is an auspicious pot, but it could mean anything that covers, the entire body, or just the stomach, and then the seas, the earth, the Sun god, and even Vishnu, since he protects all Beings; all of these in a certain context could be referred to symbolically as 'Kumbh'.

Both, one that is covered, or one that covers may be referred to as 'Kumbh'. Thus, in a broader sense even the rivers and wells and natural lakes may be called 'kumbh' because their waters are covered or sheltered by all directions. The skies are cloaked with Air, the Sun



covers all the directions with Light, and the body itself is covered with cells and ligaments, thus they are also 'kumbh' when being referred to as containers or contained. Desire or passion is also "kumbha" because it envelops the universe and thus 'Kāma' or desire is also labeled Brahmā. Vishnu is not just immanent in all Nature but envelops the Universe as well, thus He is the Complete Kumbh.

However, the popular story from mythology related to the Kumbh is briefly as follows:

Due to a curse of the fiery ascetic Durvāsā, the gods (*devas*) were getting weaker while their enemies the Daityas were getting stronger by the day. Feeling threatened, they went to Brahmā (creative principle) and Vishnu (the sustainer) who advised them to churn the Ocean from which ultimately ambrosia, giving eternal life would emerge, and which they could partake of to gain immortality.

The churning of the Ocean of Milk (*Kshirsāgar*) by the *devas* and *danavas*, brought forth the pot of Ambrosia from the Ocean along with many other valuable and precious articles, most of which the gods benefited from in many ways while the serpent Vāsuki, whom they had used as the rope to churn it, spewed forth venom which Lord Shiva magnanimously drank and kept the poison in his throat (hence He is known as Neelkantha) Thus poison also came from the sea as did the fourteen gems.

"Vishamcāmbudhey, Ratnāni chaturdashāni".

Fourteen precious items are said to have emerged from the churning of the oceans, out of which the last but not the least was the pot of ambrosia, the very reason for which the gods and the demons had agreed to set aside their enmity for awhile and together join the massive effort of churning. However, in trying to save the pot of ambrosia from the demons after it emerged, the pot of ambrosia spilled at four places, out of which Prayāg was one. Nāsik, Haridwār and Ujjayani are the other well known spots where these drops fell as well and are therefore all these four places celebrate the Kumbh Mela when the stellar configuration favors them.



The devas had taken all of the precious objects that emerged but the pitcher of nectar was all that the *daityas* wanted, and that naturally then became the cause for the destruction that followed. Dhanvantari the god of medicine, gave it to the gods as he emerged, but this angered the *daityas*, causing a warlike situation again, between the contenders.

Both sides became adamant and Lord Vishnu decided to ease the situation by craftily appearing as a beautiful maiden and told them that she would distribute the ambrosia to one and all. Seeing her immense beauty, both the devas and *daityas* came under her spell. Just before doling out the juice, Vishnu in the form of Mohini, handed over the pitcher to Jayanta, Son of Indra.

Jayanta, son of Indra, ran away with the famous *Amritkumbh* (the pot containing the elixir of immortality). Since the *daityas* were in hot pursuit, it took him twelve days to bring it back to the gods. One day of the gods is equal to one year of humans. This is the reason why in accordance with the stellar configuration, in every twelve years, the festival of Purna-Kumbh is celebrated at the four places where the pot had been placed while Jayanta was running away, dodging the *daityas*.

Vishnu asked the planets, the Sun, Moon, Saturn and Jupiter to watch over Jayanta, to keep it safe. The Sun was asked to ensure that it should neither break or crack, while the Moon was entrusted to see that it did not drip or spill. The safety of the pot of Ambrosia was entrusted to Jupiter while Saturn was to take care of Jayanta who was holding the pot. It is with these four planets therefore, that the timing of the four places where the festival is held, are associated.

There is also the story about a *daitya* known as Rāhu, disguising himself to sit in line with the devas, when Vishnu finally doled out the nectar. Vishnu then severed his head after receiving a signal from the Sun. It is during this episode that Rāhu became Rāhu and Ketu, because Rahu



had tasted a drop and couldn't be killed, though is was dissected into two.

Of the planets, Mangal (Mars) and Budha (Mercury) were considered younger and therefore kept aside. No other planet god (deva) would then allow Rahu and Ketu to reside in their houses. However, Mercury (Budha) allowed them to reside in his abodes in Virgo and Gemini. This is why Rahu and Ketu are considered beneficial in case they reside in the Kanya (Virgo) or Mithun (Gemini). Mercury is the lord of houses Virgo and Gemini.

**Rashi (Zodiac Sign
or Astrology Sign)**

1. Maish (Aries)
2. Vrish (Taurus)
3. Mithun (Gemini)
4. Kark (Cancer)
5. Singh (Leo)
6. Kanya (Virgo)
7. Tula (Libra)
8. Vrishchik (Scorpio)
9. Dhanu (Sagittarius)
10. Makar (Capricorn)
11. Kumbh (Aquarius)

**Swami Graha (Lord Planet
or Ruling Planet)**

- Mangal (Mars)
- Shukra (Venus)
- Budh (Mercury)
- Chandra (Moon)
- Surya (Sun)
- Budh (Mercury)
- Shukra(Venus)
- Mangal (Mars)
- Guru (Jupiter)
- Shani (Saturn)
- Shani (Saturn)

Even Shukra (Venus) was not given any role as a watchman because he is considered the guru of the daityas and would have perhaps favored them. It was imperative that permanency (ambrosia) should not accrue to negative characteristics symbolized by the powerful daityas.

In the story which relates the episode regarding Jayanta fleeing with the Pots, it is declared that Haridwār, Nāsik, Ujjain and Prayāg were the four places where the pot had been kept for awhile, or in some versions, where some drops of nectar had fallen inadvertently.



Thus the planets (in astrological lingo) the Sun, Moon & Jupiter and the constellations Leo, Aquarius, and Aries, become the harbingers of Kumbh, and due to this fact the Kumbh festival became a festival of the astrologers as well.

Actually the stories attached to the astrological configuration popularize the stellar event among the common people, so that they understand and appreciate the significance of the event.

In fact this is a way to harmonize the forces of Nature and Human Beings, so that they may feel the Unity with Nature and learn to draw sustenance, health and longevity from Nature.

There is a famous saying, Yat Pindey, tad brahmandey, Whatever is within this body is also reflected in the Universe. How to harmonize these two and draw energy from them is one of the mystical implications of the Kumbh festival.

The Kumbh gathering occurs near rivers or water bodies in designated special places of India. In India, the sanctity ascribed to rivers symbolizes the essential harmony of Nature with Life itself. They remind one of the fluids and the elements that course through the human body. Nothing is possible within this body that houses our Self, without the cooperation of these five elements. This body, made of the basic elements of earth, water, fire, wind and ether, is thus the body-pot or *ghata*, another synonym of *kumbha* (which needs to merge with the greater Self). It is the *ghata* or *kumbha* that Kabir talks of when he avers,

*“Jal mein kumbh, kumbh me jal, bāhar bheetar pāni
Phutā kumbh, jal jalahi samāna, yah tath kaho muni gyāni”*

When the pitcher bursts, the waters within, are united with the waters without; thus say the Knowers.

The Himalayas are said to be the abode of the gods. Coming from there, the river Ganga imbibes within itself the unpolluted spirit of the forests



and the ascetics that dwell by its banks, the medicinal herbs and plants that are nourished by it and in turn nourish its waters, and the culture of the villages downstream. So does the Yamunā. The river Gangā is known by many names like *Vishnupadi* (arising from the feet of Vishnu), *Tripathgā* (flowing in all the three worlds- the heavens, earth and netherworld), and *Shivapriyā* (beloved of Shiva) etc. She is said to nullify the negativities of sinners. She is the one who emancipated the hundred sons of Sagar, the ancient King of the Solar dynasty. The waters of the Holy Ganga are not just water, it is like ambrosia itself. Thus the Kumbh at Prayāg is considered very special since here the special event also relates to the Gangā.

Ambrosia cannot be seen anywhere one just hears of it. The waters of the Ganga and other water bodies related to the Kumbh are said to be visible ambrosia. Astrologically speaking, we may consider Ambrosia as subtle vibrations arising out of the energizing effects of the Sun and other planets during these configurations, which in turn have life and health giving properties and produce bountiful natural wealth.

It is believed that these life giving vibrations which have a magnetic flow, are available during the Kumbh festival for us. The central area of the body, the region of the navel, is considered to be a Kumbh or pot. In mythological stories we find the words *kalashodadhi* (ocean in a pot), and again, the word *kumbh* is used in various different contexts. The *Kumbh* engulfs by implication, all the gods, the creatures and all the holy places of pilgrimage.

As to how this word got associated with *parva* or festival, is also a matter for research. Even today, in events related to auspicious occasions, we know that a *kumbh* is carried in procession. Whatever name one may use to refer to a pot, *kalash*, *kumbh*, *ghatam* or *ghata*, they are all related to water. They have been used to contain water, or sometimes food; however, since when did it get associated with pilgrim places, holy rivers, and fairs prolonging to a month or more, is a moot point.



Knowers of our dharma texts and historians differ on this issue. Mythology associates the festival to the very beginning of Creation, since it relates the word to the nature of creation, and sees it as the body, the stomach, the skies, and the rivers. The astrologers see this as a matter of astrological calculations, while the astronomers see it as an astronomical event.

The question arises then, as to why is this festival celebrated only at Haridwār, Prayāg, Nāsik and Ujjain. There are other bathing festivals at Vrindavana, and in Jabalpur by the Narmada river, and in Kashmir, once in Twelve years, when Jupier passes over Leo, (*he Koithar lake gets filled with water-ed*), although those are not considered as significant as these four. It is also celebrated in the South at Kumbakonam. In the North, the four main centers are related to the story of the samudra manthan, since the mythological texts do not mention about the drops of ambrosia falling at these other places.

Prayag and Haridwar also have a tradition of celebrating the *ardha kumbh* or half kumbh festival. Thus every four years or so, Kumbh is celebrated on the banks of some river or the other. It seems this was a form of a systematic rejuvenation for the body known in Ayurveda as Kāyakaḷpa. In general people think that this tradition of holding a major religious get-together like the Kumbh, pervades only from North India to the south of the Vindhya at the most, and has no counterpart down South. However, this is not so.

Like the Northern pilgrim centers Mathura, Prayāg and Kāshi (Vārānasi), the South too has major pilgrim centers for Hindus, like Kānchi and Madurai. The Kumbh festival has its parallel in South India. It is famous in Southern India as the Kumbakonam festival. (*Though not related to the story of the churning, it has its own mythology and is related to similar stellar configurations- ed.*)

It is strange that most of the people in North India do not know about this Kumbha festival of South India and neither do the priests advertise



it much. It is important for us to rise above conventions and expand our traditions in an enlightened way in order to be aware of the cultural unity of our country.

The four sites that have been mentioned are well known incient pilgrim centers, Haridwār, Prayāg, Triambak in Nāsik and Ujjain. Two of these are on the northern side of the Vindhya ranges while the other two are on the south. There is no site expected to be beyond Maharashtra towards the south, however the reality is that there is a fifth site associated with the idea of Kumbh, way down South India. It too has been famous for holy bathing every twelve years since many hundreds of years. It is Kumbakonam.

The Mahāmakham festival in Kumbakonam is celebrated every year and once in twelve years when Jupiter enters Leo, as the Mahāmakham Festival. At that time people from all over India come to bathe in the holy pond of the Mahāmakham. This is the Kumbh festival of South India. In the Teerthānk (pilgrimage Special) issue of the Kalyān magazine published by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, Kumbakonam has been mentioned. However it is celebrated only for a short period.

The history of this festival is also fairly ancient. Our seers knew about it and had prescribed it as a ritual for washing away one's sins. Vārānasi and the Sangam at Prayāg were considered most important for this same purpose.

The Sanskrit counterpart of the name Kumbhakonam is Kumbh ghonam. It is said that Brahmāji had kept a pot of Nectar by his side. There was a hole near the elongated nose (*ghona*) or mouth of the pot from which a few drops of nectar dripped out and about five kosas of land around that area became wet. This area was then named Kumbhghonam or Kumbhakonam

*Kumbhasya Ghonato yasmin sudhāpuram vinisritam
Tasmat tatpadam loke Kumbhaghonam vadanti hi.*

Kalyan, Teerthañk. Pg 34



This is why a kind of a Kumbh Fair is held at this place in the South as well, and every twelve years, when the Sun is in Aquarius, a bathing ritual is observed just as on the banks of the Ganga river. Here, the Mahāmagham, Nāgmer, Shrgapā and Kumbherner temples are considered important in particular. The Nageshwara temple reminds one of the Nāg Vāsuki temple in Allahabad. Primarily this area was associated with the Shaiva tradition but later also included Vaishnava temples.

It is believed that it is here that the sage Bhrigu had kicked Vishnu on his chest. The Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati etc nine rivers and many gods and goddesses are enshrined here. In the temple of Kumbheshwara, the Shiva image is indeed extraordinary, being in the shape of a Kumbha or pot.

The nomenclature is obviously indicative of the Kumbha configuration.

This place is near Chidāmbaram, and not as far from the seaside as are the other Kumbha sites. Kumbhakonam is mentioned with special importance in the Prayāg Shatādhyāi, and is named first in as far as the washing of sins which cannot be washed away at other places, though Prayāg is supposed to be first in importance in this regard.

*Anya Kshetro krtam pāpam punyakshetreyvinashyati
Punyaksetre Krtam pāpam Kumbhkone vinashyati
Kumbhekone ktam pāpam Vārānasyām vinashyati
Tatrāpi yatkram pāpam prayāge tatvinashyati
Prayāg Shatādhyāyi, - Poorvārdha Adhyāya 3*

This reference confirms the fact that the Purānas have also associated Kumbhakonam with the Kumbh festival.

The Astrological cycle of the Kumbh festival

Thus Kumbh is a Festival related to the astrological cycle of certain planets.



This association is embedded in the mythological story intrinsically associated with it, that of the churning of the Ocean of Milk (Kshirasāgar) by the *devas* and *dānavas*, and the emerging of the pot of Ambrosia from the Ocean along with other valuables. As mentioned earlier, Jayanta, son of Indra had run away with the famous *Amritkumbh* (pot containing the elixir of immortality).

This festival is synonymous to the fairs held at these places. From the study of the Puranas it is evident that the festival is also closely associated with the River Ganga. Prayag is of course the confluence of the Ganga (and Yamuna), Nāsik has a confluence of the river Godavari, known as the Gautami gangā; Kshipra (in Ujjain) has been equated to the Gangās having the special quality of flowing northward (*Uttaravāhini*). The Kshipra begins to flow eastward from there. Apparently it had once been a tributary of the Gangā at that point...which is why the Shivalinga there is known as the Gangeshvara. This fact is clearly indicated in two slokas of the Brahma Puran and the Skanda Puranas.

*Vindhyasya dakshine gangā Gautami sā nigadyate
Uttare sāpi vindhasya āgeerathyabhidhiyate*

-Brahma Purāna 7/8/77

*Evam muktṛvāgatā gangākalyāvana sasthitā
Gangeshwaram tu yah pashyet snātvā shiprāmbhāsipriye*

-Skanda Purāna 5/1/2 42-33

Thus, In the calculations of astrology, a Kumbh festival can occur in four ways.

- When Jupiter enters Aquarius, and the Sun has entered the constellation of Aries, then Haridwar will celebrate the Kumbha festival.
 - In Prayāg, the Kumbh begins when on a New moon day, Jupiter enters Aries, and both the Sun and the Moon enter Capricorn.
- In another calculation, when the Sun enters Capricorn and Jupiter



in Taurus, Prayāg is ripe for Kumbh.

- When the Sun and Jupiter together enter Leo, the Kumbh stellar configuration occurs on the banks of the Godāvari river in Nasik.
- Also, when Jupiter enters Leo and the Sun visits Aries, Ujjain celebrates the Festival of Kumbh.

However, just as for Prayāg, there are some alternative configurations also considered auspicious for Nasik and Ujjain.

- When Jupiter, Sun and moon all enter Cancer, and it is a new moon day, then too, the auspicious Kumbh happens on the bank of the Godavari.
- When Jupiter is in Libra, and the Sun and Moon are together on the New Moon day of the month of Kārtika, then again the liberating Kumbh configuration happens in Ujjayani.

The astrological analysis of the Kumbha and Ardha-Kumbh (half a Kumbh) auspicious dates are given in detail in four instances of the Vārāha and Brahma Purānas. The Kumbha in Haridwar thus begins once every six years. Though cyclical, it is accepted that after Haridwar it occurs in Prayag, then in Nasik and Ujjain together. While there is a difference of three years between those at Prayag and Haridwar, the ones at Nasik and Ujjaini are simultaneously held after another three years of the one at Prayāg. Mostly the Ujjain and Nasik Festivals are held at the same time but sometimes the Kumbh at Ujjain may take place before Nasik.

The Kumbh festival Cycle

The astrological cycle of the Kumbh festival, and the general *Melā* duration is also connected to the special festival dates for bathing. Different scholars have expressed different views on the subject of this Kumbh-cycle.

Some insist that it can be held after every twelve years. Others insist that the astrological configuration is a prerequisite and unless the stars are in their appropriate spaces, the time is not ripe for the celebration.



Thus if the astrological configuration is not according to the prescribed one, then sometimes the Kumbh "Time" may happen after 11 or 13 years as well. This happens due to the retrograde movement of Jupiter and the time it then takes to orbit the Sun, amounts to 11.86 years from which about 50 days are lost between 12 solar years of the earth. This amounts to a difference of about one year between every sixth and the seventh Kumbh festival. (4331.572 days or 11.86 years).

According to astrological calculations, Jupiter takes about 84 years to move from one constellation to another. This way six kumbh festivals follow the 12 year cycle but the seventh falls in eleven years (to make up for the time lost).

In every century, this happens at least once. Thus the role of Jupiter is extremely important in deciding the dates for the Kumbh festival. It is known that out of the twelve famous astrological signs, Kumbh or Aquarius is the eleventh. The nine planets also figure in the calculations.

Aquarius is a water sign and its Lord is Saturn. Saturn is an Air sign. Water and Air is what creates the climate. The Sun and the earth complete the earth and fire signs. The Kumbh can be held at the very same time configurations when the stars and planets are in the same position as that of the original time when the drops of immortality fell at these places on earth.

The configuration of stars and planets in certain constellations marked the original event. Whenever the same configuration happens, the Sun the moon and Jupiter have to be in the same combination otherwise it cannot be celebrated. According to Hindu mythology, the gods' 12 days amounts to about 12 human years. So the Poornakumbha festivals are held once in twelve years.

In astrological calculation the sun, moon and the month is found to match easily but one has to wait for twelve years for Jupiter to enter the same configuration. Usually the same interval $12 \times 7 = 84$ years would



prevail for the Mahakumbh, but In the 85th year Jupiter can complete the cycle in 11 instead of twelve years.

In accordance with astrological texts there are seven planets to be considered; viz. the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn. Rahu and Ketu are two ancillaries like diacritical marks. In astronomy all planets that orbit the Sun are included in the Solar system. These are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus Neptune, and Pluto. These planets circle the sun at different speeds within their orbits while also revolving themselves. The times of their individual revolutions as well as their orbits combine to create these subtle differences which in turn differentiates the time that each planet can be seen in the different constellations. The constant movement of these planets, thus is the cause of these different 'time slots' or in astrological parlance, 'yogas', when individually or in groups, the planets are "seen" to enter certain constellations. The entire cycle of Kumbha festivals and their bathing timings is dependent upon this factual basis. Bathing at such times are considered immensely auspicious and the faithful can certainly gain immense release from everyday tensions.

The Kumbh as mentioned in the Nātyashāstra of Bharat Muni
The ancient text *Natya Shastra* (ascribed to Bharat 200BC-200 AD- ed.) mentions clearly the dramatization of the episode of the churning of the Ocean and the festival. This is considered the very first dramatized episode.

The text of this treatise on Theatre is considered the Fifth Veda. The importance of this text lies in the fact that it specifically mentioned that all people without any caste and creed barriers can avail of this, because Bharat wished all castes to be empowered.

It is mentioned, that a Kumbh or auspicious pot is to be installed, before staging any play. This may not be related to the pot of Ambrosia, but the idea of a Kumbh as an auspicious object may have risen from this.



*Kumbh salilam sampurnam, pushpamālā puraskrtam
Sthāpayedragamdhye tu suvanam chātra dāpyet
Evam tu `pujānam sachetano...etc*

Thus, in the center of the stage area, one should first establish a pot full of water decorated with flower garlands, and drop a piece of gold into it. "Having thus worshipped, I said to Brahmā, -O illustrious one, Please tell us which play to perform. Then I was told by Lord Brahma, "Stage the play of the Churning of the Ocean. This is an episode that fills one with enthusiasm and energy. This is also very appealing to the gods.

Natyashāstra of Bharata, pp 58-64

This type of format of the play was known as the 'samavakār' type and this format is supposed to be instrumental in enhancing the *dharma* as well as material gains. Along with the other gods, Shankara (Shiva) is facilitated as well on the occasion of the performance of this play.

The play projects the unity of the trinity of Brahmā-Vishnu-Mahesha and the welfare of the gods, which prevails to date. The performance of the episode of the burning of the three cities (by Shiva) was performed after this play.

This declaration by Bharat Muni enhances the importance of the story of the Churning of the Ocean even more.

The fifth Veda, as this treatise of Theater is known, was written for the benefit of all castes and creeds because while Bharata wrote for all educated classes also, he wanted the masses to get the benefit of the texts in an enjoyable and easily understandable way.

The importance of the Kumbh festival & Melā is also somewhat similar. It is open to all, no caste or creed is forbidden to take a dip in the Ganga or during the Kumbh. The so called lower castes are supposed to have emerged from the feet of Vishnu and so is the Gangā. These are prevailing beliefs. Thus the relationship between both is that of sister



and brother, and this fact, if highlighted, would be very useful for social and cultural harmony. Thus Kumbh negates any kind of discrimination.

In fact, our viewpoint is made of two essential ingredients. First the symbol of life giving Oxygen, our Breath, is the visible ingredient, and the second negative element is the exhalation of the breath full of carbon-dioxide. Similarly, both positive and negative energies keep changing as per the configuration of the constellations of stars and the situation of planets. Sometimes the positive energies increase, and sometimes the negative ones predominate. Our ancient seers had figured this out and knew its mysteries in relation to human Life.

The mass of Jupiter is considered the largest center of these positive energies. Therefore, in the astrological texts it is often referred to as the Life -element..

Saturn is considered the opposite, a center of negative energies. This why it is feared as the negativity causing planet. By and large in Hindu astrology, the two and a half, and the Seven and a half years of *Shani dwelling* states (*dashā*) in one's horoscope engenders fear in people.

Excepting in the twelfth degree, all of the Sun is considered auspicious. The Black spots in the Sun are considered the negativity causing sections of the Sun.

The moon is considered negativity generating only in its darker days, when nearing the New Moon state. On other days, and specially during its Full Moon states, it is full of positive energies. In this stage, it weakens and disables the negative energies

Venus is of a dignified nature usually, but it gets charged by other planets. Thus it gets affected by other planets easily. Thus when negativities prevail, it energizes the negative.

The effect of Mars is not limited to exterior beauty of form, but also on the ability to analyze things intellectually.



Mercury adds weight to whichever house it dwells in, and it acts by enabling the properties of that house. It has no separate existence otherwise, in this sense. Therefore in the Jyotish texts, it is sometimes referred to as the impotent planet. Again, Rahu and Ketu have no separate importance. They are of a lower standing, and these are positivity-negating (negative) elements.

‘Jyotish’ or Indian astrology has divided the entire cosmos into twenty seven constellations or Twelve ‘Rāshis’. The nine planets are basic to astrology. Each rāshi or constellation is affected in some way or the other by these passing planets, and are therefore considered in relation to them at the time.

The Sun is the Ruler of the sign Leo, and Moon is the ruler of Cancer. Saturn is the ruler of Capricorn and Aquarius, Venus the ruler of Libra and Taurus, and Jupiter the ruler of Saggitarius and Pisces. Mercury is the ruler of Virgo and Gemini, and it is in these two planets that Rahu and ketu, the nodes, have space, but they run diagonally so actually they have no permanent space. Mars is the ruler of Aries and Scorpio.

It is believed that when Jupiter enters the effective planets (in a horoscope), it destroys the negative tendencies, while it increases the positive ones. Jupiter also energizes whichever angle of the earth it focuses on, and fills it's precincts and its adjacent areas with Life-giving properties. A similar happening occurs during the Kumbh festival.

Thus when Jupiter enters Aquarius of which Saturn is normally the ruler, and the Sun and Moon both are in the stabilizing star Aries, then in such a configuration, the entire area around Haridwār called ‘Panchpuri’, is energized by such life- energizing properties.

This is why long living, disease free and faithful people gather in large numbers at this place during this time. Similarly, when Jupiter enters the area of Venus or Shukra, known as the guru of the *daityas*, namely the constellation of Taurus, then conjoined with the situation of the



Sun and the Moon, the drops of ambrosia, life-energizing properties similar to rains, may occur at Prayāg.

In Summer, the negative and fiery effect of the Sun's rays scorch and plague the earth. At that time Jupiter enters the house of the Sun and Moon, the house of Leo. When the Sun together with the Moon resides at that time in that *Rāshi* or star-sign of Leo, then the source of the pure Godāvari river, becomes charged with Life –enhancing properties. It is at this time that the faithful aggregate there in large numbers of lakhs of people.

Similarly. when Jupiter enters Leo, Sun enters Aries, and Venus in Cancer, Moons in Libra, on the banks of Shipra, in the ancient city of Ujjain, the city of the Mahākāl, (aspect of Shiva), hundreds of thousands of people flock to celebrate the Kumbh. The life-enhancing vibrations are thus the key basis to the celebration of the Kumbh. The same fact holds good for the Ardha or 'half' Kumbh held every six means.

In Prayag at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, it has been celebrated customarily when Sun enters Capricorn and Jupiter in Scorpio, the half Kumbh happens. The positive vibrations at the time overcome the negativities generated by the negativities of the planets and configurations if any.

The Mystery of the Kumbha.

In Indian culture, the earthen pot or Kumbh is a symbol of the Creation. Just as the Potter creates the earthen pot with the aid of five elements, so also the Creator also creates the entire world with the same materials. There is a deeper underlying meaning of the famous shloka regarding the earthen pot thus created auspiciously.

*Kalashasya mukhey Vishnu, kanthey rudra samasthitā
Muley tatra sthito Brahma, madhye mātrikā smrtā
Kukshau tu Sāgarāḥ sarve sapta dvipa vasundharā
Rgvedotatha Yajurvedo Sāmavedo atharvahah
Angaishca samhitāḥ sarvey kalsham tu samāshritāḥ*



The literal meaning is of course that Vishnu resides at the mouth of the pot as does Shiva around the throat. At the base is Brahmā and in the middle are the Celestial Mothers. Within are the seven seas, and the seven continents, and the synthesis of the four Vedas. All symbolically reside in the pot that is Kumbha.

Popularly the sun, moon and Jupiter are the three main heavenly bodies involved in the Kumbh configuration. The Sun is the Self, The Moon is the Mind, and Jupiter is knowledge. The Self is perennial, indestructible and Peaceful. The Mind is fickle. Knowledge leads to emancipation. The Mind disappearing into the Self, and the Intellect being completely steady, becomes the cause of Liberation.

The steadfastness of Knowledge is possible only when the intellect is steady. Jupiter enables such an intellect oriented toward liberation. The occurrence of Jupiter in the stable signs of Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius is indicative of a still intellect. The togetherness of the Moon and the Sun or their setting together is the ascendance of the mind over the Self. When both the Self and the mind are together, progress is made on the path of Self-evolution.

Sometimes the Kumbh and ardh-Kumbh are associated with the synonyms within the body, the stomach, the sea, the earth, the Sun, and Vishnu. The well is also a symbol of the pot.

Since the time taken to orbit the sun/earth by all the planets is different in each case. The Moon takes 29.5 days, Mercury 88 days, Venus 224 days, the Sun 364.25 days, Mars 389 days, Jupiter 11 and 3/4 years. Therefore their effects will also last for different durations.

Rahu and Ketu move through the constellations in a tangential manner in 18 years. Mercury is nearest to the Sun and Venus is the next. Then come the orbits of the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Amidst these cycles of movement, when the Sun, Jupiter and Moon conjoin, then it is calculated to be the Kumbh or ardhkumbh. Thus detailed calculations need to be made.



From Capricorn to Gemini is considered the northward motion or Uttarāyana of the Sun, and from Cancer to Saggitarius is the southward of Dakhināyana movement of the Sun. The Kumbh in prayāg occurs during the Uttarāyana phase. Here the motion of the Sun is of importance.

The mystical aspect : It is believed that there are six power centers or *chakras* in the human body. The body is a sixth entity made of the five elements. Passion, Anger, greed, obsessive attachment, ego and indolence are the six enemies of man.

In this body or Kumbh, made of the five elements, these enemies can be defeated after evolving through the six *chakras*.

According to the axiom and belief, yat pindey tad brahmāndey, what lies within is also without, the movement of the planets in the outer world thus are also reflected in the planet centers within.

The axial spinal nerves, Idā, Pingalā and the central Sushumnā nerves (also referred to as Gangā, Yamunā and Saraswati in medieval saint literature and yogic texts, are supposed to join at the Ajnyā chakra, or at the center of the brows. Prayāg is thus the Ajnyā chakra or meeting of the three rivers Gangā, Yamunā and the hidden Saraswati, of the Earth body).

Man can progress spiritually beyond the *Ajnyā chakra* only after touching these areas. This is the place of the Sun. All the other planets also reside in the various *chakra* centers. Thus the outer and the inner worlds reflect each other.

(Thus the Kumbh mela and its astrological implications too, can be reflected upon at different levels of understanding, and also understood at a deeper inner level depending upon one's guru and path. -ed)



Vishnu as Kurma formed the base of churning to steady the mandar mountain



Vishnu as Mohini cleverly duped the Asuras



Confluence of the rivers Ganges, Yamuna and Hidden Saraswati at Prayag



Ramkund at Nasik



The Kumbh Mela at Ujjain



The Kumbh Mela at Haridwar



Mahakal of Ujjain in a special festival getup(shringar)



Kashi Vishwanath, a major jyotirlinga at Varanasi



Trimbakeshwar at Nasik



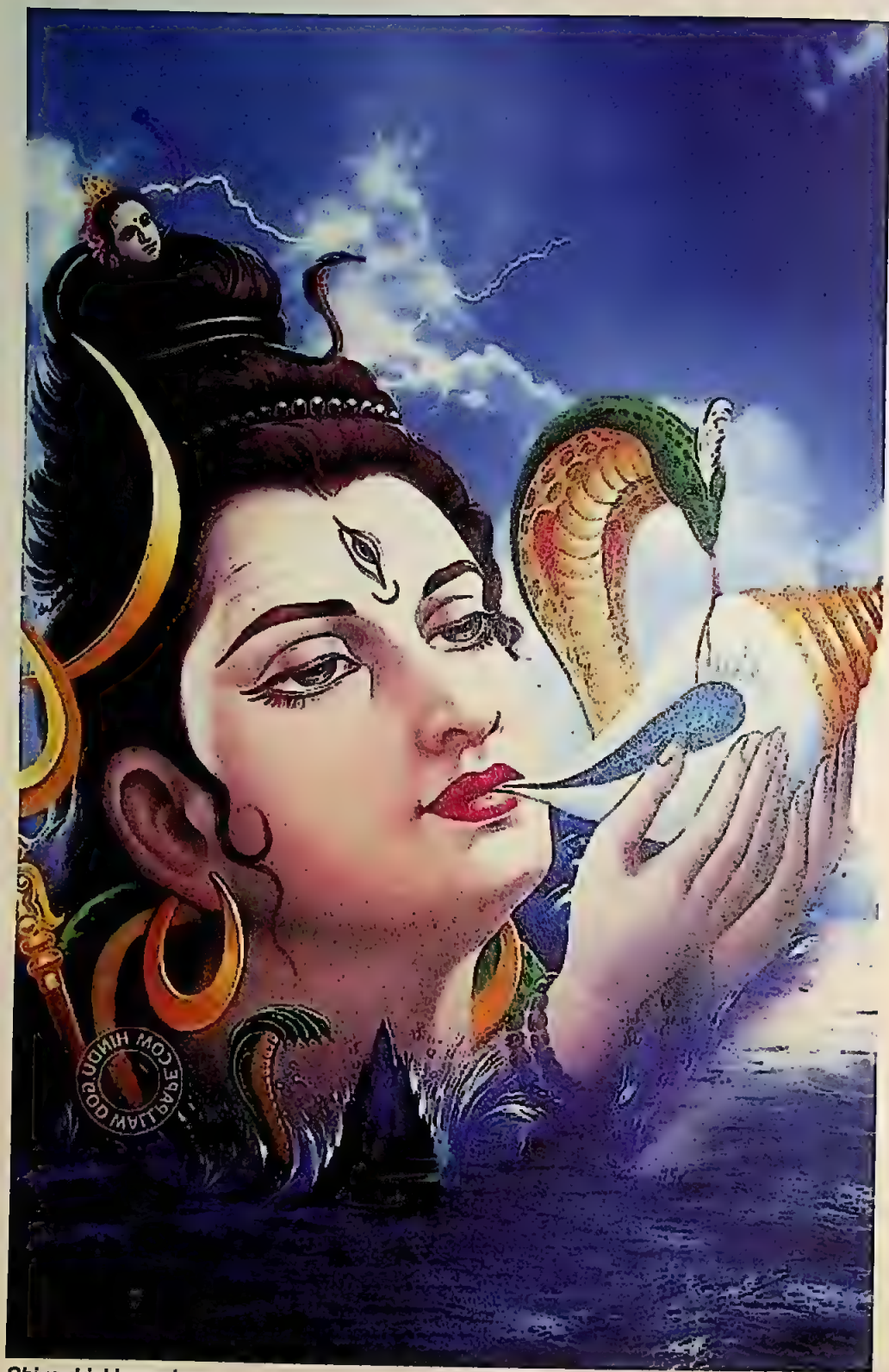
Another jyotirlinga of the bank of the river Narmada Omkareshwar



Vishnu, one of the major players, took the conch, the mace and the Kaustabha gem



Lakshmi emerging from the ocean, went back to her Lord Vishnu



Shiva drinking poison



EXPERIENCING SACRED SPACE AND SACRED TIME

Ratna Lahiri

(Some parts of this essay are based on a lecture given
at Berkeley, on Framing Sacred Space and Time, in 2009)

Experiencing Sacred Space and Sacred Time

In the Ocean of the mind Positive and Negative energies constantly aspire to overcome each other. Sometimes the Positive energies win, at other times they lose to the strong Negative impulses. Such is the Nature of the Human mind that this churning is inevitable and must go on for each Mind to evolve. For mortals to find a meaningful existence, one needs to relate to a Timeless dimension, spiritually and mentally. No wonder this churning must happen in the *Ksheer Sāgar* or the Ocean of Milk, indicating a very special kind of ocean that is implied in the *Samudra manthan* episode related to the Kumbh Melā.

We all know from experience how milk yields a variety of treasures when churned. So does the mind, when linked to the mythological Ocean of Milk. It reacts, when conflict and emotional upheavals take place. It can be quietened by contemplation and guided meditation, while surrendering to the Universal Consciousness, which always seems to help the positively inclined *provided it is for the greater good*. Materially speaking also, in any major human endeavor, there are many hurdles which need to be surmounted with diligent hard work. So negativities, like the *Kālakoota* Poison and *Jyesthā*, the goddess of misfortune also arise from the same Ocean when churned.

The Kumbh Melā is proof that India remains faithful to its tradition by participating in its ancient beliefs and mythology, and has not relegated them only to tourist or museum interests. Infact, almost instinctively the people relate both to the rivers and their ancestors as being very relevant to their present existence. Afterall these are the same rivers where the mythological heroes like Krishna and Arjuna as well as their own ancestors had also immersed themselves. One has to personally experience it to really know how effectively it plays its assigned role of passing on the traditional learning at all levels of understanding. The villager, the mendicant, the city dweller the small town dweller, all experience the Melā at different levels of understanding in accordance with their own capacities. There is an ineffable attraction of its own



for each type of aspirant, and the goals may be entirely different as well, but each is uniquely rewarded, even the tourist who comes out of curiosity or the film-maker who wishes to chronicle the event for posterity, and perhaps even the charlatan who is there to make his little pile of money by hoodwinking the simpemined..

The Kumbh, like almost all rituals and observances in the Indian subcontinent, has its own hermeneutics. It is open to interpretation in many ways. It acts in ritualistic, as well as spiritual, religious and socio-cultural layers depending upon the intention of the party observing the phenomenon. Of course, as a Hindu, one is free to experience it or not. One can go to the venue each time, or never go at all. One can observe the prescribed penances or not even know about them in detail and just visit as a tourist to see the marvelous waves of humanity moving in this direction or that. One can have business as the primary purpose of attending it; for where else on earth will one get such a large number of people as a target audience with immediate needs to fulfill. Else, the path of observing a prescribed period of spritual Silence or *Mauna*, is also open and understood. If one wishes to sit quietly and meditate upon the myriad discrepancies, distractions, disasters and delusions that humanity faces or one is personally plagued with one is free to do so. One can be seeking solutions or closure some drastic event in life in the unique experience of the Kumbh.

The vitality of the tradition, as in almost every recommended solution, lies in this very fluidity and diversity of Hindu beliefs, which may be 'interpreted' according to a certain value system based on non-violence and the laws of Nature. However, the personal level of understanding and bliss experienced will naturally be different according to the experience and observation capacity of the experience, especially when there is such fluidity in the methods prescribed.

Millions of Indians need no invitation to attend the auspicious *Kumbh Melā* held at specified places and time periods. These are the places where the drops of Life giving ambrosia fell according to the well



known mythological tale. The time periods are in accordance with the stellar configurations repeating themselves every twelve or six years.

The experience is conducive to health because it gives an opportunity to periodically break from the routine hullabaloo of life and seek some advice if needed, or just contemplate and listen to the thousands of holy men or savants from the various camps that amalgamate ritually for the purpose. It brings one very close to Nature and for once it is possible to leave one's troubles behind and sink into the anonymity, if one wishes, of a gathering of millions of humans. One can just roam around to find a particular saint or experience a wide spectrum of views that flow in Hindu thought, for each is allowed to find its place in the traditional Hindu way. Besides, for those believing in astrology, the configuration of stars and the bathing in the charged waters at this auspicious time is enough of a reason to be there. It is considered highly beneficial for both spiritual merit and material benefit.

The sheer magnitude of the logistics involved and executed is indeed a marvel and a miracle by itself, occurring at different venues every twelve years, or as in the *ardh* (half) Kumbh, every six years. About 50million *kalpavasis* (followers of a rejuvenating prescription in Ayurveda) stay the entire duration of around 55 days or so, and the itinerant population amounts to more than a billion each year on prescribed bathing days, increasing every year specially for Prayāg, where the confluence of rivers has been imbued with special meaning even and mystical.

The *melā* has been known in India for thousands of years. The event related to it is described in all mythological literature known as the Puranas and inscribed on temple walls all over South and Southeast Asia. In India it is immortalized by itinerant bards and artists of folk literature, and crafted in myriad varieties of the Indian oral tradition. Madhubani & Patua paintings and sculpture, wood carvings and folk performances.

They remember a powerful story that immediately relates to the human predicament. Human Consciousness in general is the target of this



information passed on through the collective unconscious. Folk and classical music and dance, arts and crafts, and all oral traditions carry this information in many subtle ways. Such is the Nature of the Human predicament that this dilemma is inevitable and must go on. Time is limited and Mortality inevitable. How to realize oneself within this limited Time, in order to feel released from mortality and connected to the immortal aspect that knows no fear of death, thus overcoming the limitation of Time.

After all, at the risk of repealing oneself, one must acknowledge the Power of the Mind. It is from within this very mind that one has to find the capacity to churn, and contemplate using the very positive and negative energies that fight to overcome each other. The first requisite is Faith, so use Vishnu, within your own 'Higher Self', as the base on which the mind must be steadied to avoid sinking. Vishnu as kurma the gient turtle, represent the avility to with draw from sence pleasurs. He also has a thick skin, a hard back. The Mandara mountain (mana i.e. the mind, that needs dara- i.e. discipline) is to be used as the central rod for churning, so practice meditation regularly to be able to control the mind.

However, some poison is bound to emerge. There will be some difficulties and hurdles initially and inevitably. Find the Shiva within to drink the poison and keep it aside, don't let it flood you, for negative energies will arise but not prevail if you do not let them. Develop the Shiva within you, which is capable, with Shakti's help, to imbibe and hold the poison at bay. Thus the interpretation can go on, parallel to the happy ending where through Vishnu and Shiva's help and the Shakti within you coming to the aid of Shiva, the negativities are defeated and the positive energies get revitalized.

The framing of sacred space and Time for the Hindu is closely related to the idea of the Self and their holistic world-view, which makes human existence meaningful. It is the *Weltanschauung* of the Hindu way, which includes its idea of a spiraling, inexorable Cyclical Time, that gives life



its purpose. It is a cosmic view that recognizes the interrelatedness of all phenomena. Hence what is out there is within us too.

Highly scientific and technical minds steeped in Hindu culture still seek Sacred Space and Time away from their mundane existence. Though for some, sacred is opposite of the profane, there are no such hard and fast lines in Hindu thought. Astrologically auspicious time remains sacred for most Indians. Hence for the Hindu, the Kumbha timings and the self renewal that may arise out of the experience, whether in Pujā or in pilgrimage, should be in sync with what is there in outer time and space. One just needs to experience it within.

It is believed that for mortals to find a meaningful existence, one needs to occasionally relate to a Timeless dimension, spiritually and mentally. Materially speaking also, in any major human endeavor, there are many hurdles which need to be surmounted with diligent hard work. Sacrifices of immediate pleasures need to be made, it takes time and there are no immediate solutions. Some good luck and help from the powers that be like Vishnu and Shiva are also necessary. This humane aspect is perhaps the main attraction of the story of the divine churning—the “*manthan*” that produces precious gems.

For mortal, limited human existence, it is the path to a kind of immortality which adds meaning to Life. It was a realization the ancestors desired to pass on to their progeny. Hence the elaborate rituals and mythology associated with the Kumbh highlights this belief.

To find oneself in a sanctified Space and Timeless dimension, while recognizing human mortality, is a unique way of transcending the human situation. It creates awareness of the order of the Universe which must be recognized and accepted. There is a definite need for a moral structure in Human Life choices, which if ignored, may take away our right to a fair distribution of the spoils of the effort. Like the *dānavas* who lost the right to Amrita, even though they had helped so vigorously in the churning of the Ocean, the errant will not gain.



Health is closely related to the partaking of the elixir of Life. Dhanvantari is the god of Ayurveda, the medical system of India.

It is believed that four drops of this elixir fell on Earth at the four appointed places in India where the Kumbh Melas are held to date. So for total health, i.e., Spiritual as well as Mental and Physical well being, it is believed the Kumbh mela will provide the time and the place where a Self renewal will take place. Hence Healing will also happen in accordance with the self perpetuating Divine Law- *Rta. Anything healthy will renew itself.*

The real framing of sacred space, lies in the person's ability to transcend the mundane even for a moment, and to experience within oneself the Oneness of Universal Consciousness. The experience can happen anywhere but the pooja ritual is specified as a sure prescription, if one diligently develops an understanding of the same. Perhaps in meditation, perhaps in the ecstasy of singing or dancing for the deity inside an ancient temple or while dunking one's head in the sacred waters of the *gāṅgā* along with millions others. Of course it could also happen perhaps, while listening to the perfection of the melody of a Raga played by a Maestro, or in the flower scented bliss of solitude amidst snow peaked mountain; it can happen anywhere. The Kumbh is a tried and tested alternative prescription that gives other benefits as well.

One has to experience the 'dubki' or the immersion in the Ganga at the holy time of the Kumbh Mela, on a cold January morning, to realize its full implications. One is reminded of the moment in time described in William Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils" this moment that could "flash upon the inward eye", that moment which is "the bliss of Solitude." For one is alone when going down under the water with immersing the head totally. This immersion of the head, is an immersion of pride, a surrendering of the Self, while a new Self arises from the waters, overwhelmed with the blissful experience shared by the oneness with so many fellow travelers. Travelers to the Kumbh are all known as



‘Yātri’. For they are all one of us human seekers, no caste or creed is proscribed, all are fellow travelers, the *yātri*, on the path.

Fair or festival, and personal *pujā* space or not the transcendence of the mind through the power of Intention is the key. India’s gods permit it almost anywhere and aid it if one is able to call them to help sincerely. They have to do so if called sincerely, it is their natural law, their covenant.

It is recognized, that while one is able to transcend the limited even for a moment, one can create Sacred Space at almost any Time. If within oneself, one has framed Sacred Space, then one transcends Time momentarily. If this is done regularly and with the right diet and following the behavioral injunctions conducive to Oneness with Nature, that is when ‘Healing’ is also assured.

Even today, festivals as well as daily rituals, foster a sense of connectedness to the natural order, and thus to Nature and Tradition. Visiting pilgrim centers recreates this connection. Nature and the four fundamentals- fire, water, earth and air, help the body and mind to regain composure, for these are the very elements they body & mind are made of.

The gods too, are believed to congregate at the same place at such times, as have the pilgrim ancestors who have also touched the same (but flowing) waters. The human visit then connects to all of these predecessors, while still recognizing the ever changing flow of Time

Thus in the Sacred Space of pilgrimage festivals like the Kumbh Mela, one not only transcends Time but also mundane Space, since while reliving the mythology, one feels connected spatially to the mythical and ancestral lore. Every pilgrim center will have anecdotes related to the characters in the epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata or with the biographical legends of Saints. Arjuna had come here, Sita sat



there, this is the fire lit by Sai Baba, that is where Krishna was resting when the hunter shot his arrow to kill him etc.

In any pilgrimage undertaken in India, the journey itself can also be an experience in Sacred Space, for the pilgrim centers have unified Bhārat from time immemorial. All pilgrims from the southernmost point of this 'varsha', would consider themselves blessed to be able to have 'darshan' of the northernmost Himalayan centers of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Jamunotri, or Vashno Devi and Kamakhya which had been visited by their ancestors as well as the epic characters like the Pandavas. Similarly, pilgrims from the north feel blessed when they immerse their beings in the waters of KanyaKumari or the Setubandha Rameshvaram tīrtha- the abode of the Shivalinga that was installed by Rama himself. Shakta teerthas are even more farflung, touching Pashupatināth Nepal and Hinglaj in Balochistan in Pakistan. Dwarka of Krishna, Rameshwaram and Ayodhya of Rama, and the twelve Jyotirlingas all over India are such sacred spaces of renewal.

Thus, the churning is as important as the result of the churning the partaking of the poison as important and unavoidable as the drinking of the nectar of immortality the journey is as important as the destination.

Sacred Space can be occupied within a festival ritual, or pilgrimage bathing center which has both spiritual and physical healing properties, or even during the daily puja ritual or meditation at home. However, Rivers and waterbodies are of special importance. Nature and the elements are an intrinsic part of the Hindu world view, esp Earth Fire and Water in fact the word water is closely related to the word 'tirtha', sometimes synonymous. The Hindu has an intrinsic feel for ecological awareness not because he loves Nature as some outer 'useful thing' to be cherished by man or perish His love is an all encompassing Love for the Self, - a unified whole of which he is only a part there of He is also a part of Nature and therefore, not the 'master' of Nature.



All major religious Fairs and festivals are related to the concept of *Teertha*, or pilgrim center, one must therefore also understand the full import of the word *Teertha*.

India is full of such centers- almost every major riverside, and every mountain chain is glorified in the *Puranas*. While driving around the countryside one can see a temple on many a hillock and see the holy bathing rituals while crossing rivers. *Tīrtha*, thus, has a number of meanings. The guru is *teertha* because he helps to cross, and so are the waters of the holy rivers and lakes.

This 'crossing over' is crucial- from this to the other side, from the routine to the special, from the mundane to the sacred. It is difficult for the Hindu to say that it is a crossing over from the profane to the sacred when almost all daily activities can be performed with a 'sacred' intent, or a sanctifying chant.

Symbolically, the crossing over means that attainment of first-hand knowledge is necessary to transcend the limitations of the human predicament. As has been explained in the second essay by Vidyanivas Misra, the experience has to be like walk through the actual waters of the river, a first hand experience. One must search for it in places where spiritual leaders often congregate who can help in the crossing over. What better place than the Kumbh and Mahākumbh gatherings, where the Masters come from every corner of India, to exchange views and disseminate the truths they have experienced themselves. The living quarters and bathing arrangement for the 'sādhus' as these renunciates are called, is set aside from that of the camps of the householders. Major *āshrams* or *akhārās* are given places of priority in accordance with their following. The Naga or naked sadhus are kept away, but given pride of place for the 'royal or *shāhi snān*' event which is a priority bathing time for the semi-naked and naked mendicants

Earlier Yajnas were held on the banks of rivers where scholars and savants gathered to discuss issues of Life and Religion. The Upanishads



were mostly developed on the banks of the Saraswati that is the ever flowing one, also synonymous with Vāk, the 'word' or speech. There is archaeological evidence of yajnas and civilizations related to the original Saraswati valley. If rivers were not available, any natural water-body would suffice as in the tanks of Kumbakonam and Ramkunda in Nasik where Kumbha melas take place. In Nasik the Tryambakeshwar, at the source of the godavari river is the venue for the Kumbh as well. In Prayāg, the ever flowing Saraswati is considered 'hidden' but very much there. For the Siddha and Yogic cultures Gangā and Yamunā symbolize the Ida, and Pinglā nadis, while Saraswati is the major Sushumnā nādi. These are the inner channels of the human body important for yogis.

Festivals are held regularly by the side of important water bodies. In these gatherings, problems of religion are regularly resolved in the larger context of changing Space and Time, thus the regular upgrading, cleansing and recharging the body of the dharma as it were, takes place parallel to the ritual baths and spiritual recharging of the flocking devotees. The values of changing Space and Time also get adjusted periodically once this tradition is recognized as an ever flowing river. This is the importance of remembering again and again. From the Vedic times, the Hindus had realized the importance of remembering and recharging repeatedly, for passing on any information to the collective bank of significant memories. Memories are your life. What is not in 'memory', cannot be remembered for rejuvenation. Hence 'happy' experiences are necessary for happy memories in future, and for a happy life.

Undertaking a pilgrimage is not quite tourism- because while Framing sacred space, one has to be 'In it'. In the Kumbh gatherings, the pilgrim is supposed to undertake a vow before embarking on the journey, and while staying there, he has to fulfill this vow as a penance. He eats only vegetarian food and definitely abstains from gratification of the flesh. For the pilgrim, it is mandatory to eat a vegetarian diet. Other expectations are not mandatory, like sleeping on the floor, preferably eating just one full meal, and undertaking varieties of fasts in accordance



with his choice or ability. In the days when elaborate conveniences were not organized by the concerned governments these happened automatically. Now there are regular paths and sanitary arrangements along with electricity and water facilities arranged temporarily in the cities that spring up to tackle the event officially. Food too, is available abundantly.

Evenings are spent in discussing or listening to discourses (*śravaṇa*) in the temples or camps of various sects (*satsang*) or in the company of well known masters known as *sants*, meditating or reading the scriptures (*svādhyāya*) or singing hymns or names (*Kīrtana*). Thus these centers become instrumental in the flowing of Vāk- or the word, and knowledge flowing from generation to generation is the invisible Saraswati. This enables even the illiterate or non-reading public to know and relate to the thousands of mythological stories that have carried the Hindu belief structure and traditional knowledge over the ages. The observance of these rules are not exactly mandatory, but expected of the serious performer of the pilgrimage, and part of the Kumbh experience.

Usually during the Kumbh, the pilgrim will also perform a Pujā or worship ritual. This again is a formation of sacred space within sacred time whether performed at the Kumbh or at home. Of course, Pujā during pilgrimage at holy venues and at an auspicious time like the Kumbh or Mahahakumbh days is considered extra beneficial. The ritual of Pujā again contains a typically Hindu symbolism of sanctifying a Space in sacred time which also exemplifies the belief that Natural powers have to respond if human intention is sincere and diligently observed. For the Hindu, this sacred space can be created at home, at festival time, as a community effort or on a mental plane, as desired.

Yajna, and its subsequent derivative the Hindu Temple, are parallel to the *Pujā* ritual, which creates temporarily a sacred space whereby the same '*bhāvanā*' or intentional mental field, can be created for a possible '*avagāhana*' or immersion akin to the Kumbh *snāna*, within Sacred Space and Time. It becomes expedient for the one who cannot



or need not travel, either due to disability or financial restrictions, or by choice. It can be performed as a daily ritual or on a special occasion for a recharging of energies, and as an aid to a constant centering of oneself before venturing into the world of mundane activities.

For example the daily ritual of pooja performed with awareness of the symbolism ingrained could be of five or sixteen steps and could also include a small havan or fire oblation in the end. The five simple offerings for example, represent the five elements and so on.

Ritual offering	substance	Seed	Object	Purpose
Pādya – waters	Water	vam	Water	Love, (sneha) To acquaint himself with the deity
Gandha-Unguents the deity	Earth	lam	Sandalwood	Belief (visvāsa) that will protect
Pushpa (flowers)	Space	ham	Flowers	Respect (sammāna), that the chosen deity is the highest
Dhupa (Incense)	Air	yam	Incense	Devotion (Bhakti), by which the deity becomes one's own in a Personal Relationship.
Deepa (lamp)	Fire	ram	lamp	Knowledge (Jñāna) of the fact that the worshipper and the worshipped are ultimately One
Naivedya (Edibles)	Being	vam	Sweets	Feeling of total oneness. Tādātmya The offering is the self offered to God and then having been accepted Deity, partaking the accepted offering in turn

The offering is the self offered to God and then having been accepted Deity, partaking the accepted offering in turn is becoming one with the wishes of the Deity - a total surrender.

Thus the traditional methods of the ancient Yajna become conducive to the traditional basis for temple architecture over time and translates



just as well in the Pooja ritual whether daily or performed at the Kumbh as a special *pujā*.

Notice the seed mantra for each element as they occur within and without and as postulated in kundalini yoga are also enumerated, thereby relating the same to the basic understanding in Yoga.. The entire meaning of the *pujā* process then can be related to the concept of man's oneness with the Universe. *Yasya pindey, tasya brahmāndey*. Ecology and environmental concerns then begin within, as part of Oneself. There is no difference between Nature and the Self.

The worshipper sounds the Ghanta or sacred bell at first. By simultaneously chanting a protective mantra that draws a space around him to keep the negativities away.

*āgamārtham tu devānām, gamanārtham tu rakshasām,
Kurve ghataravam devatāhvānalakshanam.*

(to invoke the gods and revoke the negativities, I sound this loud bell indicating the arrival of the gods.)

Then he further consolidates his sacred space by notionally drawing a demarcatory circle around himself by sprinkling water all around thus assigning Sacred Space around himself or herself. by chanting,

Bhurbhuvah suvah iti digbandha, - (this chant ties up the directions herein) creating the Sacred Space around the performer.

He/She thus encloses the sacred space insulating it from all diversions and distractions as well as negative vibrations. In the end one has to reopen this space by chanting the similar mantra of releasing the space *bhurbhuvahsvaOmitidigvimoksha* the spaces herein are thus released.

It is after this that the required or desired svaroop or iconography of the Godhead is meditated upon by saying, *atha dhyānam* now I meditate.



The five offerings or sixteen offerings (panchopachār or shodashopchār pujā) are then made, which could be as simple as offering water, flower, incense, sweets and light, representing the five senses. It could include cloth offerings and many items of vegetables, milk, cereal foods, sweets and fruits. All these are offered but not compulsory. These then are distributed to one and all including the priest. The priest must be given *dakshinā* or a small fee for performing the pujā. Things signifying the five elements are mandatory in a ritual pujā.

It is interesting to note, that after the initial laudatory and meditation chants, the five or sixteen steps imitate the traditional arrival of an honored guest. Since it is believed the devatā has to come when called, He or She is taken as if an important guest has come in person, so a seat has to be offered (*āsanam samarpayāmi*) and feet (*pādyam samarpayāmi*) have to be washed to wash away the dirt of the trip undertaken from far and welcome in the form of the durva grass that never dies is given as *arghya*. The divinity is then offered water (to drink) (*āchamanam*), and is given waters for bathing and a towel for wiping his feet, etc. Perfumes are offered to apply, usually sandalwood paste representing the Earth is offered and incense offered to the sense of smell. Akshat or rice grains representing the never damaged seed, for long life, is sprinkled and the deity is worshipped with flowers, showing the lamp and lighting the incense sticks and offering food (*Pushpāni pujayāmi, dhoopam āghrāpayāmi, naivedyam samarpayāmi*). A set of clothes to wear may be offered, when the pooja is sixteenfold or in detail; and then the Lord or Goddess of the moment is invited to sit for the meal offering.

Again, after he has partaken of the offerings, his hands are washed and he is given the friendly offering of betel leaf as to an honored guest. When food is offered, all the five winds are remembered that regulate breath, help in digestion, help running the blood circulation and releasing the impurities after digestion (*prāna, apāna, vyāna, samāna, and udāna vāyus*).



After this the flaying of lights is offered, being the ultimate stage offering welcome and honor, thus the (Ārati) is performed. In the end a circumambulation (*pāḍakshinā*) and bowing (*namaskar*) is performed before the flowers are offered again and then the godhead has to be released to leave to go to where he/she belongs. So after chanting 'Yathāsthānam pratisthāpyāmi, (I let you go back to your original place) the Sacred Space that was marked out is released by uttering 'Bhurbhuvahsva Om iti digvimoksha'. Thus a sacred space can be literally created ritually and released for the purpose of a meaningful worship ritual (*pujā*).

Unfortunately the younger generation, as well as the villagers are sometimes purposely left ignorant by the priests and elders who think this information will not be appreciated in the modern day scenario. It is important to explain the procedures that are practiced. Unless told by the elders, the new generations do not understand the meaning of these actions and mantras and hence they often find it as mumbo-jumbo or meaningless rituals. Once understood, the procedure can be employed by anyone in any language. Since a dip in the Kumbha Melā is all one needs, the masses do not indulge in such knowledge gathering, and have no time for it during their normal activities. It is only when they come to camp in the festivals like this one, that the sādhus could and should enlighten them. Bhakti, or devotion is all one needs and one does not have to do a ritual *pujā* to feel the Oneness with the divine. All paths are open to the Hindu. However, if one performs a ritual, it is best to perform it meaningfully.

Man's search for meaning, even in dire circumstances, has been the subject of literature all over the world. There is one other very important reason for remembering the story of the Kumbh, ritually, every time the Kumbh occurs in real time. This is one major festival that does not practice any discrimination for the millions that come to take a dip. After all the *danav* and *devatas* alike helped in bringing forth the pot of ambrosia which rejuvenated the gods. The story recounts how but for the help of the *dānavas*, the *devas* could not have done the needful



because due to the curse of Durvāsā, they had lost their strength, health and wealth altogether. So also people sometimes need to get help from all quarters for a good cause and one should not club anyone as 'bad' if they are acting in good faith to help you. The devas got rejuvenated and retrieved their kingdom due to the farsightedness of Vishnu who took the help of the strong Daityas but did not give them the Amrita that would make them run amok due to negative tendencies. Just as the devas were rejuvenated, Similarly the people who flock to bathe in the river at this prescribed time, feel rejuvenated and full of energy, as long as they remain true to faith and goodness.

Life becomes meaningful for one and all, at least for the time being, when this collective immersion in the river as well as in the collective memory of India takes place. There is great sense of well being and joy to be felt and only those who have experienced it can realize it.

Even if there is no deeper understanding, the rejuvenation universally felt by almost all who experience the Kumbh Mela and bath is legendary. That perhaps is the real secret of the Kumbh-Mahakumbh 'melas' or gatherings in India, where millions gather at the appointed Space and Time, to gain merit and rejuvenate their Selves with a few drops of Spiritual Ambrosia. They partake of an indefinable Bliss that passes all understanding and defies description, but the experience is unforgettable and very real.

Endnotes

- ¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane, the nature of religion*. Tr by Wilard R. Trask. Harper Torchbooks. pg 13







**THE MAJOR PURANAS ON
THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE STORY**

Compiled from open sources in the public domain

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(Compilation based on various sources in the public domain; For Mahābhārata, the translation by Kishori Mohan Ganguly has been excerpted. For some others, the Puranic translations under preparation by Dharmic Scriptures team, and other texts in public domain have been summarized)

The story of the churning is found in abundance in the various literatures of India and abroad. Mostly their sources have been the Puranic lore from the Agni Purāna, Bhāgwata Purāna, Padma Purāna, and Skand Purāna, Shiv Maha Purāna and Vishnu Purāna well as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

What emerged after Vishnu facilitated the initial resources needed, and Shiva made further churning possible by drinking up the first effusion of deadly Poison, *KālaKūta*, are known as the fourteen Ratnas or gems. Sometimes the *Kālakuta* is listed as one of the fourteen Ratnas along with the kalash or Kumbh that contained the Amrita. The Enumeration differs in each reiteration of the story, and so does the numbering and the order. Therefore what emerges after a herculean effort in Life, especially a huge welfare project, is not really as important as the effort itself. The final goal of Amrita must be reached, and all else will be positive byproducts as well. These may be offered to the deities that deserve them or originally possessed them anyway; but the final goal must be shared judiciously, and only the Positive elements will gain, the Negative people will have to drop out. A number of Puranas say, "First came the Halāhal", Poison (of toil and turbulence and distractions of the mind.)

In the initial stages of sādhana a seeker's mind throws out all kinds of reactions, negative thoughts, desires and impulses out into open so that he can deal with them appropriately. These problems are basically physical suffering and mental distractions without resolving which further progress is not possible. Halāhal is the instability of the body and the mind that arises as a reaction against one's spiritual practice. For example, a drug or alcohol habit needs to be overcome before



embarking on the spiritual path, or the path of any achievement. The other problem may be Alakshmi or penury. Lack of finances is often an initial hurdle. So both are listed as by-products of the churning.

When Lord Shiva, (or any other God/ Goddess) is considered the only one able to counter this problem, he represents the ascetic principle within us. He is the destroyer of illusion, one who is detached, pure and austere. His role in this story as the consumer of poison suggests that one can deal with the early problems rising in the mind, like restlessness and lack of concentration, by cultivating the qualities of Lord Shiva, namely, courage, initiative, willingness, discipline, simplicity, austerity, detachment compassion, pure love and asceticism. It also means the instruments of yogic sādhnā like breath control and balance of body and mind, like meditation etc. can be used to aid the process. Thus a healthy body is essential on the Spiritual path. That is the purpose of Yoga, in which the eightfold facets or Astānga , includes control of the mind and intellect, meditation, concentration and ultimately Samādhi or a quiet immersion into Selfhood. The same almost, is essential even for great material Projects on Earth.

The story as related in the Mahābhārata

For example, The Mahābhārata describes the story of the churning very graphically and has been beautifully translated by Kishori Mohan Ganguly which is being excerpted in parts here. Like most Purānic literature, It is in the form of a dialogue between two scholarly discussants. Here Soota and Shaunak Rishis are portrayed as the discussants who bring the story along.

They were speaking about the celestial horse Uchchaisravā, the resplendant white horse with many heads, a steed often repeated in world mythologies. The important achievements of Vishnu (Narayana) and Shiva and the appearance of Lakshmi and Dhanvantari with the pot of Ambrosia, are emphasized. The role of Ananta Nāg, the primordial Snake King on whom Vishnu reclines and who is indestructible, is an



addition to be noted. The Poison *Kālkuta*, here rises *after* the *ratnas* after which eight more have been enumerated. The role of Nara and Nārāyana in the war that ensued after the precious things (*ratnas*) had emerged is significant. However, only the portion of the churning and the resultant pot of *Amṛta* are relevant here and are being excerpted to emphasize the vibrant quality of the episode and the incidental environmental aspects related to it. Herbs and minerals are expressly mentioned as medicinal rejuvenators, and the fact that not only immense effort produces great results but cumulative effort combined with proper management can result in immense results.

Translation of Mahābhārata Adiparva- sections 18-19.

“Saunaka asked, ‘Why did the gods churn the Ocean for nectar, and under what circumstances, when, as you say, sprang that best of steeds so powerful and resplendent ?’

Sauti said, “There is mountain named Meru, of blazing appearance, and looking like a heap of effulgence. The rays of the Sun falling on its peaks of golden lustre are dispersed by them. Decked with gold and exceedingly beautiful, that mountain is the haunt of the gods and the Gandharvas. It is immeasurable and unapproachable by men of manifold sins. Dreadful beasts of prey wander over its breasts and it is illuminated by many divine life-giving herbs. It stands kissing the heavens by its height and is the first of mountains. Ordinary people cannot even think of ascending it. It is graced with trees and streams, and resounds with the charming melody of winged choirs. Once, the celestials sat in a conclave on its bejeweled peak. They who had practiced penances and observed excellent vows for amṛta now seemed to be eager seekers after amṛta (celestial ambrosia). Seeing the celestial assembly in anxious mood Narayana said to Brahman, ‘Do thou churn the Ocean with the gods and the asuras. By doing so, amṛta will be obtained as also all drugs and gems. O ye gods, churn the Ocean, ye will discover amṛta !’”

Sauti said, “There is a mountain called Mandara adorned with cloud-like peaks. It is the best of mountains, and is covered all over with inter-twining



herbs. There countless birds pour forth their melodies, and beasts of prey roam about. The gods, the Apsaras (celestial dancers) and the Kinnaras (musician tribes) visit the place. Upwards it rises eleven thousand yojanas, and descends downwards as much. The gods wanted to tear it up and use it as a churning rod but failing to do so came to Vishnu and Brahman who were sitting together, and said unto them, 'Devise some efficient scheme, consider, ye gods, how Mandara may be dislodged for our good !'

Sauti continued, "O son of Bhrigu ! Vishnu with Brahmā assented to it. And the lotus-eyed one (Vishnu) laid the hard task on the mighty Ananta, the prince of snakes. The powerful Ananta, directed thereto both by Brahman and Narayana, O Brahmana, tore up the mountain with the woods thereon and with the denizens of those woods. And the gods came to the shore of the Ocean with Ananta and addressed the Ocean, saying, O Ocean, we have come to churn thy water for obtaining nectar!' And the Ocean replied, 'Be it so, as I shall not go without a share of it. I am able to bear the tremendous agitation of my waters setup by the mountain. The gods then went to the king of tortoises and said to him, O Tortoise-king, thou wilt have to hold the mountain on thy back.

The Tortoise-king agreed, and Indra contrived to place the mountain on the former's back. And the gods and the Asuras made Mandara churning staff and Vasuki the cord, and set about churning the deep for amrita. The Asuras held Vasuki by the hood and the gods held him by the tail. And Ananta, who was on the side of the gods, at intervals raised the snake's hood and suddenly lowered it. And in consequence of the stretch Vasuki received at the hands of the gods and the Asuras, black vapours with flames issued from his mouth.

These, turned into clouds charged with lightning, and poured showers that refreshed the tired gods. And flowers that also fell on all sides of the celestials from the trees on the whirling Mandara, refreshed them."Then O Brahmana, out of the deep came a tremendous roar like unto the roar of the clouds at the Universal Dissolution. Diverse aquatic animals being crushed by the great mountain gave up the ghost in the salt waters. And



many denizens of the lower regions and the world of Varuna were killed. Large trees abounding with birds on the whirling Mandāra were torn up by the roots and fell into the water. The mutual friction of those trees also produced fires that blazed up frequently. The mountain thus looked like a mass of dark clouds charged with lightning O Brāhmana, the fire spread, and consumed the lions, elephants and other creatures that were on the mountain. Then Indra extinguished that fire by pouring down heavy showers.”

“After the churning, O Brāhmana, had gone on for some time, gummy exudations of various trees and herbs vested with the properties of amrita mingled with the waters of the Ocean. And the celestials attained to immortality by drinking of the water mixed with those gums and with the liquid extract of gold. By degrees, the milky water of the agitated deep turned into clarified butter by virtue of those gums and juices. But nectar did not appear even then. The gods came before the boon-granting Brahman seated on his seat and said, ‘Sire, we are spent up, we have not any strength left to churn further. Nectar hath not yet arisen so that now we have no resource save Nārāyana !’” On hearing them, Brahmā said to Narayana, Lord, condescend to grant the gods strength to churn the deep afresh !’

“Then Nārāyana agreeing to grant their various prayers, said, *Ye wise ones, I grant ye “sufficient strength! Go, put the mountain in position again and churn the water!’ “Re-established thus in strength, the gods recommenced churning. After a while, the mild Moon of a thousand rays emerged from the Ocean. Thereafter sprung forth Lakshmi dressed in white, then Soma, then the White Steed, and then the celestial gem Kaustubha which graces the breast of Nārāyana. Then Lakshmi, Soma and the Steed, fleet as the mind, all came before the gods on high. Then arose the divine Dhanwantari himself with the white vessel of nectar in his hand.

And seeing him, the Asuras set up a loud cry, saying, ‘It be ours.

“And at length rose the great elephant, Airavata, of huge body and with two pair of white tusks. And him took Indra the wielder of the thunder-bolt.



But with the churning still going on, poison Kālakuta appeared at last. Engulfing the Earth it suddenly blazed up like a fire attended with fumes. And by the scent of the fearful Kālakuta, the three worlds were stupefied. And then Siva, being solicited by Brahman, swallowed that poison for the safety of the creation. The divine Maheswara held it in his throat, and it is said that from that time he is called Nilakantha (blue-throated).

Seeing all these wondrous things, the Asuras were filled with despair, and got themselves prepared for entering into hostilities with the gods for the possession of Lakshmi and Amrita. Thereupon Narayana called his bewitching Maya (illusive power) to his aid, and assuming the form of an enticing female, conquered with the Danavas. The Danavas and the Daityas, charmed with her exquisite beauty and grace lost their reason and unanimously placed the Amrita in the hands of that fair damsel."

Sauti said, "Then the Daityas and the Danavas equipped with first class armours and various weapons attacked the gods. In the meantime the valiant Lord Vishnu in the form of an enchantress accompanied by Nara deceived the mighty Danavas and took away the Amrita from their hands,

And all the gods at that time of great fright drank the Amrita with delight, receiving it from Vishnu. And while the gods were partaking of it, after which they had so much hankered, a Danava named Rahu was also drinking it among them in the guise of a god. And when the Amrita had just reached Rahu's throat, Surya and Soma (recognized him and) intimated the fact to the gods. And Narayana instantly cut off with his discus the well-adorned head of the Danava who was drinking the Amrita without permission. And the huge head of the Danava, cut off by the discus and resembling a mountain peak, then rose up to the sky and began to utter dreadful cries. And the Danava's headless trunk, falling upon the ground and rolling thereon, made the Earth tremble with her mountains, forests and islands. And from that time there is a long-standing quarrel between Rahu's head and Surya and Soma. And to this day it swalloweth Surya and Soma (during solar and lunar eclipse).



Then Nārāyana quitting his enchanting female form and hurling many terrible weapons at the Dānavas, made them tremble. And thus on the shores of the salt-water sea, commenced the dreadful battle of the gods and the Asuras.”

(Then the war is described in detail)...leading to victory.

“And having gained the victory, the gods offered due respect to Mandāra and placed him again on his own base. And the nectar-bearing gods made the heavens resound with their shouts, and went to their own abodes. And the gods, on returning to the heavens, rejoiced greatly, and Indra and the other deities made over to Nārāyana the vessel of Amrita for careful keep.”

The story of the Churning in the The Ramayana in translation
The Story of the Amrit Kumbh is mentioned in Epics as part of the creation related stories, mandatory in Sanskrit literature as part of the protocol of writing Epics. It has been translated in English many times. And is available both opensource @ sacredtexts.com and Gutenberg.org. Here Griffith's (1826-1906) translation in verse is given. Ralph Griffith was Princiocal of the Benaras College.

Ralph T H Griffuth's translation (1870-1874)- Canto I, XLV

*Were sons of Kashyap lofty-souled.
 Of sister mothers born, they vied,
 Brood against brood, in jealous pride.
 Once, as they say, band met with band,
 And, joined in awful council, planned
 To live, unharmed by age and time,
 Immortal in their youthful prime.
 Then this was, after due debate,
 The counsel of the wise and great,
 To churn with might the milky sea 3
 The life-bestowing drink to free.
 This planned, they seized the Serpent King,
 Vāsuki, for their churning-string,*



And Mandar's mountain for their pole,
 And churned with all their heart and soul.
 As thus, a thousand seasons through,
 This way and that the snake they drew,
 Biting the rocks, each tortured head,
 A very deadly venom shed.
 Thence, bursting like a mighty flame,
 A pestilential poison came,
 Consuming, as it onward ran,
 The home of God, and fiend, and man.
 Then all the suppliant Gods in fear
 To S'ankar 4, mighty lord, drew near.
 To Rudra, King of Herds, dismayed,
 'Save us, O save us, Lord!' they prayed.
 Then Vishnu, bearing shell, and mace,
 And discus, showed his radiant face,
 And thus addressed in smiling glee
 The Trident wielding deity:
 What treasure first the Gods upturn
 From troubled Ocean, as they churn,
 Should--for thou art the eldest--be
 Conferred, O best of Gods, on thee.
 Then come, and for thy birthright's sake,
 This venom as thy firstfruits take.'
 He spoke, and vanished from their sight.
 When Siva saw their wild affright,
 And heard his speech by whom is borne
 The mighty bow of bending horn, 1b
 The poisoned flood at once he quaffed
 As 'twere the Amrit's heavenly draught.
 Then from the Gods departing went
 S'iva, the Lord pre-eminent.
 The host of Gods and Asurs still
 Kept churning with one heart and will.
 But Mandar's mountain, whirling round.



*Pierced to the depths below the ground.
 Then Gods and bards in terror flew
 To him who mighty Madhu slew.
 'Help of all beings! more than all,
 The Gods on thee for aid may call.
 Ward off, O mighty-armed! our fate,
 And bear up Mandar's threatening weight.'
 Then Vishnu, as their need was sore,
 The semblance of a tortoise wore,
 And in the bed of Ocean lay
 The mountain on his back to stay.
 Then he, the soul pervading all,
 Whose locks in radiant tresses fall,
 One mighty arm extended still,
 And grasped the summit of the hill.
 So ranged among the Immortals, he
 Joined in the churning of the sea.
 A thousand years had reached their close,
 When calmly from the ocean rose
 The gentle sage with staff and can,
 Lord of the art of healing man.
 Then as the waters foamed and boiled.
 As churning still the Immortals toiled,
 Of winning face and lovely frame,
 Forth sixty million fair
 ones came.
 Born of the foam and water, these
 Were aptly named Apsarases.
 Each had her maids. The tongue would fail--
 So vast the throng--to count the tale,
 But when no God or Titan wooed
 A wife from all that multitude,
 Refused by all, they gave their love
 In common to the Gods above.
 Then from the sea still vext and wild*



Rose Surá, Varun's maiden child.
 A fitting match she sought to find:
 But Diti's sons her love declined.
 Their kinsmen of the rival brood
 To the pure maid in honour sued.
 Hence those who loved that nymph so fair
 The hallowed name of Suras bear.
 And Asurs are the Titan crowd
 Her gentle claims who disallowed.
 Then from the foamy sea was freed
 Uchchaihs'ravas, the generous steed,
 And Kaustubha, of gems the gem,
 And Soma, Moon God, after them.
 At length when many a year had fled,
 Up floated, on her lotus bed,
 A maiden fair and tender-eyed,
 In the young flush of beauty's pride.
 She shone with pearl and golden sheen,
 And seals of glory stamped her queen.
 On each round arm glowed many a gem,
 On her smooth brows, a diadem,
 Rolling in waves beneath her crown
 The glory of her hair flowed down.
 Pearls on her neck of price untold,
 The lady shone like burnisht gold.
 Queen of the Gods, she leapt to land,
 A lotus in her perfect hand,
 And fondly, of the lotus-sprung,
 To lotus-bearing Vishnu clung.
 Her Gods above and men below
 As Beauty's Queen and Fortune know. 1b
 Gods, Titans, and the minstrel train
 Still churned and wrought the troubled main.
 At length the prize so madly sought,
 The Amrit, to their sight was brought.



*For the rich spoil, 'twixt these and those
 A fratricidal war arose,
 And, host 'gainst host in battle, set,
 Aditi's sons and Diti's met.
 United, with the giants' aid,
 Their fierce attack the Titans made,
 And wildly raged for many a day
 That universe-astounding fray.
 When wearied arms were faint to strike,
 And ruin threatened all alike,
 Vishnu, with art's illusive aid,
 The Amrit from their sight conveyed.
 That Best of Beings smote his foes
 Who dared his deathless arm oppose:
 Yea, Vishnu, all-pervading God,
 Beneath his feet the Titans trod
 Aditi's race, the sons of light,
 slew Diti's brood in cruel fight.
 Then town-destroying Indra gained
 His empire, and in glory reigned
 O'er the three worlds with bard and sage
 Rejoicing in his heritage.*

The story as related in The Bhāgvata Purana, 8.8.6

The Bhagvata Purana describes how ultimately one must surrender to the Lord before the final achievements can materialize. After the gems came the desire fulfilling Pārijāta flowering tree, followed by the beautiful Apsarās. Then Sri or Laxmi, the goddess of prosperity. Thus those who follow the Sattvic or prescribed way, will have Peace and prosperity showered upon them. All the demigods wanted her but she decided to follow Vishnu. One must thus understand that the the goddess of fortune is the exclusive property of the Lord Vishnu. Wealth must be acquired through proper methods that follow the moral and spiritual way and not the demonic way. Then came Vārūni, the controlling deity of alcohol, and Bali Maharaj, the King of the Asuras took her. Thereafter



appeared the strong and healthy persona of Dhanvantari, the carrier of the Amrita and the god of Ayurveda, Dhanvantari. The asuras snatched the pot from this person, even though he was strong.. (Bhāgavatam 8.8.35). Then the gods went to Vishnu again, and he incarnated as Mohini, the ravishing woman who then duped the Asuras into handing over the distribution of the Amrita to her, and saved the situation for the devas.

(Detail translation courtesy www.vscsd.org)

"King Parikshit asked, "O great sage, how did God cause churning of the sea. What was the purpose behind it? Kindly tell me?" Shukdev says, "Parikshit, in the sixth Chakshush Manvantara, the demons king Bali had defeated the gods.

Indra had also lost his glory by insulting the garland which sage Durvasa had presented to him as a God's gift. Indra had put the garland in elephant's neck and then got it crushed under its feet. But now having lost his kingdom and struck by misfortune, Indra and other gods with Brahma prayed to the Lord Melted by their prayers, God appeared before them. All the gods laid before Him and worshiped. The omnipotent God inspired the gods to churn the sea.

Lord asked the gods to churn the sea and produce nectar. He also advised them to take the help of demons in that great task. Drinking the nectar one becomes immortal. God asked the gods to put various medicinal plants and vegetations in Kshirsagar (sea of milk) and churn it by Mandarachal Mountain moving it with the help of Vasuki the naga. God promised them of all help from His part.

Thereafter, Indra and other gods went unarmed to the demon king Bali and told him of their intention. Demons too liked the idea. With a friendly attitude then the gods and the demons together uprooted the mount Mandarachal. But they could not carry it to the sea. Lord appeared on Garuda and carried the mountain to the sea.



The gods and demons had promised Vasuki, the Naga his due share in the nectar. So Vasuki allowed them to use him as a rope, wound around Mandarachal as a means to move it. In the incarnation of Ajit, Lord told the gods to hold the head of Vasuki. But the demons suspecting some mischief said they would hold the head and asked the gods to hold the Naga from the tail for churning. Thus the gods held the tail while the demons took hold of Vasuki's head.

Thus they began the churning. But as soon as the churning began the mountain started sinking for not having a firm base. Lord then took Kachchhap (tortoise) incarnation and supported Mandarachal on His back. On the mountain also Lord appeared in Sahastrabahu form, and held it. The gods and the demons churned the sea for long but nothing emerged. So, Lord Ajit himself began to churn the sea.

First of all, it was Halahal, the deadly poison to emerge. The intensity of the poison began to torment every being. To save their subjects from it, Prajapatis prayed Lord Lord Shiva. The life-giver, Lord Bholenath (an epithet of Lord Shiva) drank all the poison. By the impact of the poison, Lord Lord Shiva's throat turned blue in color. Hence Lord Shiva got the name Nilakantha.

Emergence of Gems & Nectar: After Lord Shiva drank the poison, the gods and the demons began to churn the sea again with greater enthusiasm. Now, Kamadhenu, the divine cow emerged. She was useful for Yagya etc. so the sages received it. Then a horse named Uchchaishrava, emerged and taken up by Bali the king of demons. The horse was followed by Airavat the elephant. Indra took it. The divine gem, Kaustubh Mani, emerged then. Lord Ajit took it on His chest. Then emerged the Kalpvriksha, the divine tree that reached the heavens. Then the elves (apsaras, gandharva) emerged. They all accepted to serve Indra in Heaven. Goddess Lakshmi emerged after the elves. All the azimuths were lighted because of her brilliance.

Everyone was attracted towards her beauty, generosity, youthfulness, appearance and glory. Devaraj Indra presented a throne for her to sit. Rivers



brought water for her ceremonial bath. The earth presented medicinal bath. Cows gave Panchganyas and Vasant (spring) presented many kinds of fruits and flowers. The sages welcomed Lakshmi with Rigsuktas (hymns of Rigveda). Gandharvas sang in her praise. Then taking the lotus in her hand, Lakshmi took a seat on the throne. Sea donned her with a beautiful silk saree. Varun presented a garland. Saraswati gifted her with a necklace of pearls. Brahma presented lotus while Nagas presented two earrings.

After the singing by Brahmins in her praise, Lakshmi took lotus garland in her hand and put it around Lord Vishnu's neck in a gesture of accepting Him as her husband. Jagatpita, Lord Vishnu too gave Lakshmi a supreme position in His heart. Lakshmi was followed by Varuni who was taken up by the demons.

The gods and the demons began to churn the sea again. At last lord Dhanvantari emerged with an urn of nectar. It was Dhanvantari who developed Ayurved, the ancient Indian system of medicine. As soon as the demons saw the urn, they snatched it and ran away. A row then began among the demons over the drinking of nectar. Consoling the gods, Lord appeared among the demons in the guise of an extremely pretty woman, Mohini.

Distribution of Nectar by Lord as Mohini: The demons who were fighting over the potions of nectar forgot everything when they saw Mohini, who was actually a guise of Lord Vishnu. Lured by her prettiness the demons came to Mohini and requested her to solve the dispute for them. Illusioned by God, the demons even gave the nectar to Mohini and sat peacefully showing their confidence in her. In Mohini's guise, Lord thought that the demons were congenitally cruel and giving nectar to them would be akin to feeding sakes with milk. Their evils would increase.

So, Mohini offered the nectar to the gods only while offered wine to the demons. When the nectar was being distributed, a demon named Rahu took the guise of a god and sitting among them drank the nectar. Surya and Chandra spotted him and revealed his identity to God, who at once beheaded him. But, by then Rahu had drunk enough nectar.



16.8.4 Conquering of Heaven by King Bali Shukdev says, "Parikshit by the virtues of the ambrosia, the gods had become invincible. They began to take revenge and the demon king Bali met his death in the battle. When Brahma saw the imminent extermination of the demons, he sent Devarshi Narad in the battlefield to make the gods abstain from the war. The surviving demons carried the dead Bali towards Astachal. There, Shukracharya, the teacher of the demons, resurrected all the demons with his Sanjivani Vidya (knowledge that resurrects the dead)."

The story as described In the Padma Purāna

In the Padma Purāna, the entire episode is related in a nutshell, as an explanation of the birth of Laxmi. In Padma, 2.1.4, it is significant that Vārūni or alcohol has been given to the Asuras here, which got them drunk and rowdy and easier to fool.

2.1.4 The Manifestations of Goddess Laxmi

When Bheeshma expressed his desire to know about the manifestation of goddess Laxmi.

Pulastya replied-- Once, after being defeated by the demons, the deities went to Lord Vishnu and sought his help. Lord Vishnu instructed them to collect all the medicinal herbs, and put them in the Ksheersagar, so that after the churning of the ocean ambrosia could be retrieved. Lord Vishnu also advised them to use the Mandara Mountain as a Churner and the serpent--Sheshnag as a rope for churning the ocean. The deities then reached an agreement with the demons according to which both the groups were supposed to unitedly churn the ocean. The great Mandāra mountain was uprooted and placed on the back of the tortoise--the embodiment of Lord Vishnu.

Sheshnag coiled around that mountain and both the ends were held by the demons and the deities respectively.



The deities intelligently chose the tail-end, while the demons in their foolishness chose the mouth-end. The venom spilled by Sheshnag destroyed the power and strength off the demons. When the process of Churning began, the first thing to emerge from the sea-bed was Kāmdhenu--the holy cow. The deities claimed the ownership of this divine cow. Subsequently, Vārūni (intoxicating drink) emerged from the sea-bed, which was claimed by the ignorant demons. During the process of ocean-churning, various kinds of things emerged out from the ocean--

Parijat, sixty crore apsaras, the moon and the Kālkuta (poison), which were distributed among the demons and the deities. Lord Mahadev drank the Kālkuta for greater good when he saw that there was no taker for it.

The churning of ocean also resulted into the manifestation of the ambrosia-pot, Uchchaishrava (the divine horse) and Eravat (the divine elephant). Ultimately, goddess Laxmi manifested herself, seated on a lotus.

The deities eulogised her by chanting the mantras of Sri Sukta. The deities were desirous of having goddess Laxmi on their side, so were the demons, but Lord Brahmā instructed Vishnu to accept her as his consort. The demons became furious and snatched the ambrosia-pot from the hands of Sage Dhanvantari. Lord Vishnu then disguised himself as the most enchanting woman and fooled the demons into giving back the ambrosia-pot. Lord Vishnu served from the pot to the deities who became immortal after drinking ambrosia. A tremendous battle was then fought between the demons and the deities. But, the demons were defeated in this battle and fled to the netherworld to protect their lives. The deities eulogised Lord Vishnu and returned to heaven.

- Padma Purāna, Srishtikhand 1.4

The story as told in the Agni Purāna

In the Agni Purāna, this episode is discussed in the perspective of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, namely, in the Avatār khand, 1.2 Kurma, i.e., the incarnation of Vishnu as the giant turtle or Tortoise.



In order to steady the Mandāra mountain which was otherwise slipping into the Ocean, Vishnu as Kurma or a giant turtle, offered to dent his hard turtle shield back as the depression in which the pole like Mandāra could be placed. The main difference from other Purāṇas, besides the order, is that Vārūni or alcohol is gladly accepted by the devas, as Surā. The daityas, it is said therefore, are known as Asurā.

Many years ago there was a war between the devas (gods) and the daityas (daityas) and the gods lost this war. They prayed to Vishnu to rescue them from the oppression of the daityas. Vishnu told Brahma and the other gods that they should have a temporary truce with the daityas. The two sides should get together to churn the ocean. Vishnu would ensure that the devas benefited more from this churning of the ocean than the daityas did.

The truce was agreed upon and the two sides got ready to churn the ocean. The mountain Mandāra was used as a churning rod and great snake Vāsuki as the rope for churning. The devas grasped Vāsuki's tail and the daityas grasped Vāsuki's head. But as the churning began, the mountain Mandāra which had no base, started to get immersed in the ocean. What was to be done? Lord Vishnu came to the rescue. He adopted the form of a turtle and the peak was balanced on the turtle's back.

As the churning continued, a terrible poison named kālākuta emerged from the depths of the ocean and was swallowed by Shiva. Shiva's throat became blue from this poison and he is therefore known as Nilakantha, blue of throat.

The goddess Vārūni, the goddess of wine (sura), came out next. The gods readily accepted her and thus they came to be known as suras. But the daityas rejected Varuni and were therefore known as asuras.

She was followed by the Pārijata tree, a beautiful tree that came to occupy the pride of place in Indra's garden.



A jewel named koustubha emerged and was accepted by Vishnu as his adornment.

Three wonderful animals came out next - the cow Kapilā, the horse Ucchaishravā and the elephant Airavata. They were followed by the apsaras, beautiful women who became the dancers of heaven. They were known as apsarās because they emerged from āp (water).

The goddess Lakshmi or Shri came out next and was united with Vishnu.

Finally, Dhanvantari emerged with a pot of amrita (the life - giving drink) in his hands. Dhanvantari was the originator of medicine (ayurveda). The daityas led by Jambhāsūr gave half of the amrita to the devas and departed with the remaining half.

But Vishnu quickly adopted the form of a beautiful woman. So beautiful was the woman that the daityas were charmed. "Pretty lady," they said. "take the amrita and serve it to us. Marry us." Vishnu, as Mohini, accepted the amrita, but he had no intention of giving it to the daityas. He served it to the gods instead.

There was only one daitya who was somewhat clever. His name was Rāhu. He adopted the form of Chandra, the moon-god, and succeeded in drinking some of the amrita. The sun-god and the moon god noticed what was happening and reported it to Vishnu. Vishnu thereupon cut off Rahu's head with a sword.

But Rahu had drunk the amrita, so he could not die. He prayed to Vishnu and Vishnu granted him a boon. The boon was that occasionally Rahu would be permitted to swallow up the sun and the moon. You can see this happening at the time of the solar and the lunar eclipses. People who give alms during such eclipses are blessed.



The gods obtained the amrita and the daityas did not. Thus, the gods became more powerful than the daityas. They defeated the daityas and regained heaven.

Many gem and valuable herbs also came out of the churning. The Kaustubh gem is the first and foremost of them. The Lord Vithoba image wears the Kaustubha, just as Vishnu himself took the gem as it emerged. Kaustubhamani is the gem worn by Vishnu, and his various manifestations. In the *Brahma Purāna* 1.3.9, Kaustubhamani has been described thus: Kaustubha is the best jewel among all the gems. One who bears it, must be gentle, knowledgeable, virtuous etc. Similarly, the Padmarāga mani, like Ruby, is also enumerated as rising from the Ocean in the *Bhāgwata Purāna*. The exterior of a god-fearing person on the spiritual path is usually gentle, soothing and delicately hued like the Padmarāg mani, exuding brilliance without pride or haughtiness.

The story as told in the Vishnu Purāna. (Vishnupurana chapter IX.)

Summary: The entire episode is described as the Legend of Lakshmi: Durvāsas gives a garland to Indra: he treats it disrespectfully, and is cursed by the Muni. The power of the gods gets impaired, so they are oppressed by the Dānavas, and have recourse to Vishnāu. There are long praises of Vishnu and then he advises a temporary truce with the dānavas, for the churning of the oceans. The churning of the ocean happens and among the other precious things Sri or Laxmi emerges. The devatas then indulge in long Praises of ārī. In detail, the story goes thus:

Maitreya says - "O sage! It is heard that Lakshmi was produced from Ksheersagar during the churning of the sea but you say that Lakshmi was the daughter of Bhrigu and Khyāti. How is it possible?"

Parashar says- "O great Brahmin! Lakshmi who never separates from the Lord is Herself eternal like Him. But still, as you have expressed your doubt, I will narrate you the real story."



The famous short-tempered sage Durvāsa is a partial incarnation of Shankar. One day, he was wandering on the earth when all of a sudden, he happened to see an extremely divine beauty. She was wearing a garland of beautiful flowers. The sage requested the beauty to give him that garland. She presented the garland respectfully to the sage. The sage adorned the garland on his head and began to wander again. Right at that moment, he saw Indra riding on Airāvāt and going somewhere in the procession of the gods. Instinctively, sage Durvāsa put that garland around the neck of Indra but Indra removed it and put it on Airāvāt's head. Airāvāt pulled the garland with his trunk and smashed it on the ground. This whole sequence of events infuriated Durvāsa who cursed Indra. "O Indra! You are so inebriated with your luxuries that you dared to insult my humble gift. Hence, all your splendour shall be destroyed. You will lose all your wealth."

Indra at once descended from the elephant and began to request sage Durvāsa.

Durvāsā said- "Indra! Forgiveness has no place in my personality. So, all your repenting is meaningless." Saying this, sage Durvāsa departed from the scene and Indra too left for Amrāvati.

Very soon, the curse began to show its influence. With the loss of Indra's luxuries, all the verdancy on the earth too began to wane. Hermits too began to give up Yagyas. All the human beings began to be guided by greed and gave up pious virtues. And at a place where pious virtues have no room, Lakshmi too doesn't stay there. She made her abode in the abysmal depth of the sea. Very soon, the demons launched an attack on the gods and drove them out of heaven. Indra along with other gods approached Brahma and told him the whole thing.

Brahma suggested to them to go to Lord Vishnu. He assured them also that Lord Vishnu would definitely protect them. Brahma even accompanied the gods to Lord Vishnu. There, they together prayed to Lord Vishnu and intimated Him about their ordeal.



Pleased by their prayers, Lord Vishnu appeared before them and said—“I will definitely help you regain your splendour. Presently, do what I say. You reconcile with the demons and convince them to carry out the churning of the sea. Then bring all kinds of herbs and put them in the sea. With the help of the demons and using Mandarāchal as churner and Vāsuki, the Nāg as the rope to carry out the churning of the sea. Thus, you will recover ambrosia drinking which, all of you will become immortal and regain your strength.”

Following the advice of Lord Vishnu, the gods reconciled with the demons and convinced them to carry out the churning of the sea. They together procured all kinds of herbs and put them in the sea. Then they began the churning using Mandarāchal Mountain. As soon as the churning began, Mandarāchal began to sink. Lord Vishnu took incarnation of Kachchhap (the great tortoise) and bore the weight of the mighty mountain on His back. During the churning, Kāmadhenu, the wishful cow was the first to emerge. It was presented to the sages as an aid for their Yagyās. It was followed by Vārūni, Kalpavriksha (the wishful tree) after which, beautiful damsels appeared. The Moon followed the damsels and was taken up by Shiva on His forehead. During the churning, huge quantity of poison had also emerged. It was drunk by Lord Shiva and some parts of it were taken up by the serpents. In the end, Dhanvantari himself emerged from the sea carrying the urn of ambrosia. It was during the churning itself that Lakshmi appeared once again from the sea holding lotuses in her hands.

In somewhat greater detail, the story goes as follows:

PARÁSHARA.—But with respect to the question thou hast asked me, Maitreya, relating to the history of ā́rī, hear from me the tale as it was told to me by Maríchi.

Durvásas, a part incarnation of shankara (shiva) was wandering over the earth; when he beheld, in the hands of a nymph of air a garland of flowers culled from the trees of heaven, the fragrant odour of which spread throughout the forest, and enraptured all who dwelt beneath its shade.



The sage was in a religious mood when he beheld that garland, demanded it of the graceful and full-eyed nymph, who, bowing to him reverentially, immediately presented it to him. He, as one in a religious trance, placed the chaplet upon his brow, and thus decorated resumed his path; when he beheld (Indra) the husband of āchī, the ruler of the three worlds, approach, seated on his infuriated elephant Airāvata, and attended by the gods.

The phrensied sage, taking from his head the garland of flowers, amidst which the bees collected nectar, threw it to the king of the gods, who caught it, and suspended it on the brow of Airāvata, where it shone like the river Jāhnavī, glittering on the dark summit of the mountain Kailāsa. The elephant, whose eyes were dim with inebriety, and attracted by the smell, took hold of the garland with his trunk, and cast it on the earth.

That chief of sages, Durvāsas, was highly incensed at this disrespectful treatment of his gift, and thus angrily addressed the sovereign of the immortals: "Inflated with the intoxication of power, Vāsava, vile of spirit, thou art an idiot not to respect the garland I presented to thee, which was the dwelling of Fortune (Shrī). Thou hast not acknowledged it as a largess; thou hast not bowed thyself before me; thou hast not placed the wreath upon thy head, with thy countenance expanding with delight. Now, fool, for that thou hast not infinitely prized the garland that I gave thee, thy sovereignty over the three worlds shall be subverted. Thou confoundest me, Shakra, with other Brahmans, and hence I have suffered disrespect from thy arrogance: but in like manner as thou hast cast the garland I gave thee down on the ground, so shall thy dominion over the universe be whelmed in ruin. Thou hast offended one whose wrath is dreaded by all created things, king of the gods, even me, by thine excessive pride."

Descending hastily from his elephant, Mahendra endeavoured to appease the sinless Durvāsas: but to the excuses and prostrations of the thousand-eyed, the Muni answered, "I am not of a compassionate heart, nor is forgiveness congenial to my nature. Other Munis may relent; but know me, Shakra, to be Durvāsas. Thou hast in vain been rendered insolent by



Gautama and others; for know me, Indra, to be Durvāsas, whose nature is a stranger to remorse. Thou hast been flattered by Vashishtā and other tender-hearted saints, whose loud praises (have made thee so arrogant, that thou hast insulted me. But who is there in the universe that can behold my countenance, dark with frowns, and surrounded by my blazing hair, and not tremble? What need of words? I will not forgive, whatever semblance of humility thou mayest assume."

Having thus spoken, the Brahman went his way; and the king of the gods, remounting his elephant, returned to his capital Amarāvati. Thenceforward, Maitreya, the three worlds and shakra lost their vigour, and all vegetable products, plants, and herbs were withered and died; sacrifices were no longer offered; devout exercises no longer practised; men were no more addicted to charity, or any moral or religious obligation; all beings became devoid of steadiness; all the faculties of sense were obstructed by cupidity; and men's desires were excited by frivolous objects. Where there is energy, there is prosperity; and upon prosperity energy depends. How can those abandoned by prosperity be possessed of energy; and without energy, where is excellence? Without excellence there can be no vigour nor heroism amongst men: he who has neither courage nor strength, will be spurned by all: and he who is universally treated with disgrace, must suffer abasement of his intellectual faculties.

The three regions being thus wholly divested of prosperity, and deprived of energy, the Dánavas and sons of Diti, the enemies of the gods, who were incapable of steadiness, and agitated by ambition, put forth their strength against the gods. They engaged in war with the feeble and unfortunate divinities; and Indra and the rest, being overcome in fight, fled for refuge to Brahmá, preceded by the god of flame (Hutáāna). When the great father of the universe had heard all that had come to pass, he said to the deities, "Repair for protection to the god of high and low; the tamer of the demons; the causeless cause of creation, preservation, and destruction; the progenitor of the progenitors; the immortal, unconquerable Vishṇu; the cause of matter and spirit, of his unengendered products; the remover of the grief of all who humble themselves before him: he will give you aid."



Having thus spoken to the deities, Brahmá proceeded along with them to the northern shore of the sea of milk; and with reverential words thus prayed to the supreme Hari:--

"We glorify him who is all things; the lord supreme over all; unborn, imperishable; the protector of the mighty ones of creation; the unperceived, indivisible Nārāyanā; the smallest of the smallest, the largest of the largest, of the elements; in whom are all things, from whom are all things; who was before existence; the god who is all beings; who is the end of ultimate objects; who is beyond final spirit, and is one with supreme soul; who is contemplated as the cause of final liberation by sages anxious to be free; in whom are not the qualities of goodness, foulness, or darkness, that belong to undeveloped nature. May that purest of all pure spirits this day be propitious to us. May that Hari be propitious to us, whose inherent might is not an object of the progressive chain of moments or of days, that make up time. May he who is called the supreme god, who is not in need of assistance, Hari, the soul of all embodied substance, be favourable unto us. May that Hari, who is both cause and effect; who is the cause of cause, the effect of effect; he who is the effect of successive effect; who is the effect of the effect of the effect himself; the product of the effect of the effect of the effect, or elemental substance; to him I bow.

The cause of the cause; the cause of the cause of the cause; the cause of them all; to him I bow. To him who is the enjoyer and thing to be enjoyed; the creator and thing to be created; who is the agent and the effect; to that supreme being I bow. The infinite nature of Vishnu is pure, intelligent, perpetual, unborn, undecayable, inexhaustible, inscrutable, immutable; it is neither gross nor subtle, nor capable of being defined: to that ever holy nature of Vishnu I bow. To him whose faculty to create the universe abides in but a part of but the ten-millionth part of him; to him who is one with the inexhaustible supreme spirit, I bow: and to the glorious nature of the supreme Vishnu, which nor gods, nor sages, nor I, nor Shankara apprehend; that nature which the Yogis, after incessant effort, effacing both moral merit and demerit, behold to be contemplated in the mystical monosyllable Om: the supreme glory of Vishnu, who is the first of all; of



whom, one only god, the triple energy is the same with Brahmá, Vishṇu, and Shiva: oh lord of all, great soul of all, asylum of all, undecayable, have pity upon thy servants; oh Vishṇu, be manifest unto us."

Paráshara continued.--The gods, having heard this prayer uttered by Brahmā, bowed down, and cried, "Be favourable to us; be present to our sight: we bow down to that glorious nature which the mighty Brahmā does not know; that which is thy nature, oh imperishable, in whom the universe abides." Then the gods having ended, Vrihaspati and the divine Rishis thus prayed: "We bow down to the being entitled to adoration; who is the first object of sacrifice; who was before the first of things; the creator of the creator of the world; the undefinable: oh lord of all that has been or is to be; imperishable type of sacrifice; have pity upon thy worshippers; appear to them, prostrate before thee. Here is Brahmā; here is Trilochana (the three-eyed Shiva), with the Rudras; Pushā, (the sun), with the Ādityas; and Fire, with all the mighty luminaries: here are the sons of Aswinī (the two Aswinī Kumāras), the Vasus and all the winds, the Sshdhyas, the Vishwadevas, and Indra the king of the gods: all of whom bow lowly before thee: all the tribes of the immortals, vanquished by the demon host, have fled to thee for succour."

Thus prayed to, the supreme deity, the mighty holder of the conch and discus, shewed himself to them: and beholding the lord of gods, bearing a shell, a discus, and a mace, the assemblage of primeval form, and radiant with embodied light, Pitāmaha and the other deities, their eyes moistened with rapture, first paid him homage, and then thus addressed him: "Repeated salutation to thee, who art indefinable: thou art Brahmá; thou art the wielder of the Pināka bow (Shiva); thou art Indra; thou art fire, air, the god of waters, the sun, the king of death (Yama), the Vasus, the Māruts (the winds), the Sādhyas, and Viāwadevas. This assembly of divinities, that now has come before thee, thou art; for, the creator of the world, thou art every where. Thou art the sacrifice, the prayer of oblation, the mystic syllable Om, the sovereign of all creatures: thou art all that is to be known, or to be unknown: oh universal soul, the whole world consists of thee. We, discomfited by the Daityas, have fled to thee,



oh Vishṇu, for refuge. Spirit of all, have compassion upon us; defend us with thy mighty power. There will be affliction, desire, trouble, and grief, until thy protection is obtained: but thou art the remover of all sins. Do thou then, oh pure of spirit, shew favour unto us, who have fled to thee: oh lord of all, protect us with thy great power, in union with the goddess who is thy strength."

Hari, the creator of the universe, being thus prayed to by the prostrate divinities, smiled, and thus spake: "With renovated energy, oh gods, I will restore your strength. Do you act as I enjoin. Let all the gods, associated with the Asuras, cast all sorts of medicinal herbs into the sea of milk; and then taking the mountain Mandara for the churning-stick, the serpent Vāsuki for the rope, churn the ocean together for ambrosia; depending upon my aid. To secure the assistance of the Daityas, you must be at peace with them, and engage to give them an equal portion of the fruit of your associated toil; promising them, that by drinking the Amrita that shall be produced from the agitated ocean, they shall become mighty and immortal. I will take care that the enemies of the gods shall not partake of the precious draught; that they shall share in the labour alone."

Being thus instructed by the god of gods, the divinities entered into alliance with the demons, and they jointly undertook the acquirement of the beverage of immortality. They collected various kinds of medicinal herbs, and cast them into the sea of milk, the waters of which were radiant as the thin and shining clouds of autumn. They then took the mountain Mandāra for the staff; the serpent Vāsuki for the cord; and commenced to churn the ocean for the Amrita. The assembled gods were stationed by Krishnā at the tail of the serpent; the Daityas and Dānavas at its head and neck. Scorched by the flames emitted from his inflated hood, the demons were shorn of their glory; whilst the clouds driven towards his tail by the breath of his mouth, refreshed the gods with revivifying showers. In the midst of the milky sea, Hari himself, in the form of a tortoise, served as a pivot for the mountain, as it was whirled around. The holder of the mace and discus was present in other forms amongst the gods and demons, and assisted to drag the monarch of the serpent race: and in another vast



body he sat upon the summit of the mountain. With one portion of his energy, unseen by gods or demons, he sustained the serpent king; and with another, infused vigour into the gods.

From the ocean, thus churned by the gods and Dānavas, first uprose the cow Surabhi, the fountain of milk and curds, worshipped by the divinities, and beheld by them and their associates with minds disturbed, and eyes glistening with delight. Then, as the holy Siddhas in the sky wondered what this could be, appeared the goddess Vārunī (the deity of wine), her eyes rolling with intoxication. Next, from the whirlpool of the deep, sprang the celestial Párijáta tree, the delight of the nymphs of heaven, perfuming the world with its blossoms. The troop of Āpsarās, the nymphs of heaven, were then produced, of surprising loveliness, endowed with beauty and with taste. The cool-rayed moon next rose, and was seized by Mahādeva: and then poison was engendered from the sea, of which the snake gods (Nágas) took possession. Dhanwantari, robed in white, and bearing in his hand the cup of Amrita, next came forth: beholding which, the sons of Diti and of Danu, as well as the Munis, were filled with satisfaction and delight. Then, seated on a full-blown lotus, and holding a water-lily in her hand, the goddess shrī, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves. The great sages, enraptured, hymned her with the song dedicated to her praise. Vishwavasú and other heavenly quiristers sang, and Ghritāchi and other celestial nymphs danced before her. Gangā and other holy streams attended for her ablutions; and the elephants of the skies, taking up their pure waters in vases of gold, poured them over the goddess, the queen of the universal world. The sea of milk in person presented her with a wreath of never-fading flowers; and the artist of the gods (Vishwakarmā) decorated her person with heavenly ornaments. Thus bathed, attired, and adorned, the goddess, in the view of the celestials, cast herself upon the breast of Hari; and there reclining, turned her eyes upon the deities, who were inspired with rapture by her gaze. Not so the Daityas, who, with Viprachitti at their head, were filled with indignation, as Vishnāu turned away from them, and they were abandoned by the goddess of prosperity (Lakshmī.)



The powerful and indignant Daityas then forcibly seized the Amrita-cup, that was in the hand of Dhanwantari: but Vishṇu, assuming a female form, fascinated and deluded them; and recovering the Amrita from them, delivered it to the gods. Shakra and the other deities quaffed the ambrosia. The incensed demons, grasping their weapons, fell upon them; but the gods, into whom the ambrosial draught had infused new vigour, defeated and put their host to flight, and they fled through the regions of space, and plunged into the subterraneous realms of Pātāla. The gods thereat greatly rejoiced, did homage to the holder of the discus and mace, and resumed their reign in heaven. The sun shone with renovated splendour, and again discharged his appointed task; and the celestial luminaries again circled, oh best of Munis, in their respective orbits. Fire once more blazed aloft, beautiful in splendour; and the minds of all beings were animated by devotion. The three worlds again were rendered happy by prosperity; and Indra, the chief of the gods, was restored to power Seated upon his throne, and once more in heaven, exercising sovereignty over the gods, āakra thus eulogized the goddess who bears a lotus in her hand:

“I bow down to shrī, the mother of all beings, seated on her lotus throne, with eyes like full-blown lotuses, reclining on the breast of Vishṇu. Thou art Siddhi (superhuman power): thou art Swadhā and Swāhā: thou art ambrosia (Sudhā), the purifier of the universe: thou art evening, night, and dawn: thou art power, faith, intellect: thou art the goddess of letters (Saraswatī). Thou, beautiful goddess, art knowledge of devotion, great knowledge, mystic knowledge, and spiritual knowledge which confers eternal liberation. Thou art the science of reasoning, the three Vedas, the arts and sciences . Thou art moral and political science. The world is peopled by thee with pleasing or displeasing forms. Who else than thou, oh goddess, is seated on that person of the god of gods, the wielder of the mace, which is made up of sacrifice, and contemplated by holy ascetics? Abandoned by thee, the three worlds were on the brink of ruin; but they have been reanimated by thee. From thy propitious gaze, oh mighty goddess, men obtain wives, children, dwellings, friends, harvests, wealth. Health and strength, power, victory, happiness, are easy of attainment to those upon whom thou smilest. Thou art the mother of all beings, as



the god of gods, Hari, is their father; and this world, whether animate or inanimate, is pervaded by thee and Vishnāu. Oh thou who purifiest all things, forsake not our treasures, our granaries, our dwellings, our dependants, our persons, our wives: abandon not our children, our friends, our lineage, our jewels, oh thou who abidest on the bosom of the god of gods. They whom thou desertest are forsaken by truth, by purity, and goodness, by every amiable and excellent quality; whilst the base and worthless upon whom thou lookest favourably become immediately endowed with all excellent qualifications, with families, and with power. He on whom thy countenance is turned is honourable, amiable, prosperous, wise, and of exalted birth; a hero of irresistible prowess: but all his merits and his advantages are converted into worthlessness from whom, beloved of Vishṇu, mother of the world, thou avertest thy face. The tongues of Brahmá, are unequal to celebrate thy excellence. Be propitious to me, oh goddess, lotus-eyed, and never forsake me more."

Being thus praised, the gratified ārí, abiding in all creatures, and heard by all beings, replied to the god of a hundred rites (shatakratu); "I am pleased, monarch of the gods, by thine adoration. Demand from me what thou desirest: I have come to fulfil thy wishes." "If, goddess," replied Indra, "thou wilt grant my prayers; if I am worthy of thy bounty; be this my first request, that the three worlds may never again be deprived of thy presence. My second supplication, daughter of ocean, is, that thou wilt not forsake him who shall celebrate thy praises in the words I have addressed to thee." "I will not abandon," the goddess answered, "the three worlds again: this thy first boon is granted; for I am gratified by thy praises: and further, I will never turn my face away from that mortal who morning and evening shall repeat the hymn with which thou hast addressed me."

Parshāara proceeded.--Thus, Maitreya, in former times the goddess ārí conferred these boons upon the king of the gods, being pleased by his adorations; but her first birth was as the daughter of Bhrigu by Khyáti: it was at a subsequent period that she was produced from the sea, at the churning of the ocean by the demons and the gods, to obtain ambrosia. For in like manner as the lord of the world, the god of gods, Janārdhana,



descends amongst mankind (in various shapes), so does his coadjutrix shrī. Thus when Hari was born as a dwarf, the son of Aditī, Lakshmi appeared from a lotus (as Padmā, or Kamalā); when he was born as Rāma, of the race of Bhrigu (or Parashurāma), she was Dharanshī; when he was Rāghava (Rāmachandra), she was Sītā; and when he was Krishna, she became Rukminī. In the other descents of Vishṇu, she is his associate. If he takes a celestial form, she appears as divine; if a mortal, she becomes a mortal too, transforming her own person agreeably to whatever character it pleases Vishṇu to put on.

Whosoever hears this account of the birth of Lakshmi, whosoever reads it, shall never lose the goddess Fortune from his dwelling for three generations; and misfortune, the fountain of strife, shall never enter into those houses in which the hymns to Shrī are repeated.

Thus, Brahman, have I narrated to thee, in answer to thy question, how Lakshmi, formerly the daughter of Bhrigu, sprang from the sea of milk; and misfortune shall never visit those amongst mankind who daily recite the praises of Lakshmi uttered by Indra, which are the origin and cause of all prosperity.

The story as told in the Skanda Purāna

Being a Shaiva Purana, this version is quite different, involving sage Vashishta instead of Durvāsa and highlighting the role of Shiva instead of Vishnu. Sage Lomesh narrates the tale, which describes how Indra lost heaven after he showed disrespect to Vashishta. (Skanda-1.3)

Once, Indra was enjoying the songs sung by Gandharvas when sage Vashishta arrived. But, Indra was so engrossed in music, that he forgot to welcome his distinguished guest. Sage Vashishta was enraged by his behavior and went away fuming with anger. When the demon King Bali--the lord of *Pātāloka*, learnt about this incident he attacked *Indraloka* with a large army. A fierce battle took place in which all the deities were defeated.



Bali and his army brought all the wealth to Pātālloka. But the demons were not destined to be the owner of this plundered wealth for too long as the whole wealth got submerged into the ocean. Bali was surprised and asked Shukracharya about the reason. Sage Shukracharya revealed to Bali that he could not enjoy the splendours of devas wealth because he had not performed 100 Ashwamedha yagyas.

The deities, after being defeated went to seek Lord Vishnu's help. Lord Brahma was also present with them. After giving a deep thought to the whole issue, Lord Vishnu advised them to patch up with the demons so that all the wealth could be retrieved from the ocean bed. The deities went to Pātāl-loka and convinced the demons to participate in the churning of the ocean. When the process of churning of the ocean began,

The Mandarāchal mountain was used as a churner and the serpent Vasuki as the rope. Both the parties immersed the Mandarāchal mountain into the ocean but it sank down, as there was no base upon which it could be placed. So, Lord Vishnu took the form of a tortoise and held the mountain on his back.

Churning of the ocean resulted into the emergence of many things like Chandrama (moon), Surabhi (cow), Kalpa tree, Kaustubha gem, Uchchaisravā (Horse), Erāvat (elephant), goddess Laxmi, poison, ambrosia, intoxication etc. When poison emerged from the sea bed, neither the deities nor the demons made any claim for it. The poison was so venomous that the whole world started getting inflamed by it. Lord Shiva then drank the Halahal poison and thus the world was saved. Lord Vishnu accepted goddess Laxmi as his consort.

Skanda Purāna 4.1.5 The Emergence of Ambrosia

When Dhanvantari appeared with a pot of ambrosia in his hands, a demon named Vrishparva snatched it from him.

All the demons then fled to Pātāl loka with the pot of ambrosia. Lord Vishnu disguised himself as an enchanting beauty and went to Pātālloka.



There, he found all the demons quarrelling among themselves. Each of them wanted to have his own share of ambrosia first. The demons were stunned by Mohini's beauty the moment they saw Lord Vishnu in the form of a beautiful lady. Mohini took control of the ambrosia pot and summoned the deities to Pātāl loka.

All the deities and demons were made to sit in separate rows. Mohini then started distributing ambrosia to the deities. A demon named Rāhu, who had disguised himself as a deity was also sitting among the deities. Hardly had Rāhu gulped down some ambrosia then Mohini severed his head on the information given by Chandramā (Moon). The severed head of Rāhu tried to take revenge by swallowing chandrama, who took the refuge of Lord Shiva. Shiva kept Chandramā safe within the locks of his hair.

Meanwhile, Rāhu too came chasing Chandrama and Lord Shiva wore his head as a garland in his neck.

The Shiva Mahāpurana gives a slightly different slant to this story, with Shiva as the main player.

Shiva Mahapurāna 3.21 Lord Vishnu Creates Turbulences

After the churning of the ocean had been accomplished, numerous things had emerged out from the ocean. Jewels, the Moon, Laxmi, Poison, Uchchaishravā horse, Erāvat elephant and the Vessel containing Nectar were some of the things which emerged out from the ocean after the churning.

A tremendous battle was fought between the deities and the demons to have control over the vessel containing the Ambrosia. The demons had snatched that vessel from the deities. By the divine inspiration of lord Shiva, Vishnu appeared in the form of Mohini – the enchanting beauty. He successfully recovered that vessel from the control of the demons.



The Vārāh Puraāna mentions the event of the churning only in passing, as cause for the birth of Chandramā or the moon. the Shaiva Puranas obviously highlight the role of Shiva instead of that of Vishnu.

To distract the attention of the demons from the nectar, lord Vishnu created numerous enchanting beauties. When the demons saw them, they forcibly carried these enchanting beauties to their abode –the Nether world. After that they again returned to take control of the Nectar.

By that time, Vishnu had made the deities drink all the nectar. When the demons came to know about this, they became very furious and attacked the deities. A tremendous battle ensued between both the sides. Ultimately the demons got defeated. To save their lives the demon ran towards their abode. Lord Vishnu chased the demons and entered the Netherland. He killed all the demons.

The other main fourteen puranas mention the churning in passing while some do not mention it at all. It is to be noted that none of them mention the Kumbh Melā or the four places where the drops of *amrita* fell. Hence that extension of the myth seems to have been added later in medieval times.

Primarily it is by innuendo referring to the inner vascllations and efforts involved in any major enterprise which has to be a community effort. Everyone involved may not be perfectly inclined but ultimately the fruits of labor do come forth and there are additional by products, good and bad, which have to be assimilated somehow for the greater good. When the Lord is on your side, the benefits will accrue. Only One who can imbibe the poison will become like a Shiva. Success can come only when there are powers like the preserver and protector of a Vishnu and the self sacrificing greatness of a Shiva behind it. This is what we could take away from the Kumbha.





MYTHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS
Dramatis Personae of the Story of the Churning

Ratna Lahiri

In a land which does not have a hundred percent literacy rate, it may seem strange that the average villager knows so much about his mythological inheritance. The masses in India were unlettered, and many still are, but they were educated by other methods and steeped in culture through mythology and a strong oral tradition. It was strengthened over generations through pilgrimage and related travels, rhymes and anecdotes, folk arts, but mostly through itinerant performers and grandma tales passed on by nurturing womenfolk.

In addition, traditional methods of sowing and irrigating and harvesting, and songs that are sung alongside, again by women, tell them a lot about the planetary configurations in the sky conditions of atmospheric and climatic requirements and such practical technical knowledge necessary for agriculture. Traditional medicine as well as day to day cooking methods tells them a lot about herbs and their beneficial, medicinal properties. Stories galore, heard through grandmothers and itinerant storytellers and bards, make them aware of the treasure house of mythology that is related in some form or the other to seem relevant even today. So even though they hardly require an introduction to the dramatis personae of the churning of the Ocean from any book, here is a glossary of sorts to introduce some aspects of the characters involved in the Churning of the Ocean, for those who have not been so lucky.

It must be made clear that most elements in a story have deeper meanings and innuendoes which can be chosen or not, for various levels of interpretations and understanding. This is not unique to the Indian tradition, albeit it is heightened and an essential feature of the common thought process even today.

As Eliade says, "Symbolic thinking is consubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason. The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality- the deepest aspects- which define any other means of knowledge. Images symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of

being. Consequently , the study of them enables us to to reach a better understanding of Man- man as he is. Before he has come to terms with the conditions of History."

There is a much greater function of the myths which are alive and repeated, sometimes in differing versions, in India. Thus they are being used as a vehicle to pass on the collective wisdom of the forefathers to their grandchildren and so on, becoming a living tradition and advice in the form of stories and pictures that become a part of he collective unconscious. Thus to understand India, it would be helpful to understand its vast mythological repertoire. The Kumbh Mela serves this unifying function in the cultural scenario by repeating this myth at every Mela ground everytime the event is held, to which thousands and millions flock.

Thus the story of the primordial clash between the devas and dānavas is remembered almost every four years due to the Kumbh and ardh Kumbh fairs being held alternately at these four places.

For one who lets himself go in deeper, the separation of this sacred Time within passing Time at a Sacred place where Amrita had once charged the waters before, becomes doubly meaningful as he takes a dip exactly when the zodiacal combination is believed to recharge the waters with the same vibrations experienced at the beginning of Time.

The wishfulfiling capacities of the Kalpavriksha or Pārijata and of Surabhi the Kamadhenu Cow, or the gems like Kaustubha, signify the various siddhis or special powers that do come to well known Saints and followers of spiritual penance. These powers are natural byproducts of Sāadhanā but must not be given much importance on the Spiritual path or those of great ahcievevements.

Nidra or sloth, and Varuni the goddess of Surā wine, may be impediments of the path and must be kept under control. Sometimes these are also listed as emanating from the churning because they too are definite



byproducts of herculean effort, and need to be overcome if material or spiritual success is to be pursued in Life.

The Fourteen 'ratnas' or treasures enumerated differ in number and variety in the *Purānas* relating the story of Kumbh. Thus totaling sometimes to even more than fourteen and sometimes less, they resemble positive and negative qualities which may be expected on the path of any major endeavor. Their symbolism is interpreted in many ways to suit the spiritual path one has chosen to adhere to. Thus implying that beneficial byproducts of the spiritual path, or that of honest labor for the greater good, are many.

In the general story of the Kumbh Melā known and repeated over the ages, they rose from the Ocean of Milk signifying the field of Pure Consciousness. The 'Chetna' is to be the venue of spiritual evolution and of 'Sādhanā' or spiritual endeavors. Within this field of consciousness, the mind has to be held steadfast like the Mandara mountain, Both positive and Negative propensities have to be harnessed in the practice that requires much effort and perseverance. The serpent Vāsuki is the rope of desire, with a thousand heads, which has to be held totally in control. When the Mandara sinks, i.e., when the mind is not steady and unable to concentrate, the trick is to surrender to the Lord to help withdraw your distractions. Vishnu, the Lord of Faith and Preservation, will help in the form of a tortoise or giant turtle, that can withdraw its senses totally for one pointed concentration. Thus human consciousness and the steadfast mind itself has to be used for this inner churning and the Kurma symbolizes a one track mind, withdrawing from all outer senses. The concentration thus acquired will then reveal many positive and negative fruits.

In some Puranas, at the first came Halahala- the Kalkoota poison, symbolizing the huge problems and negativities that have to be encountered on the path of spiritual progress, or any great achievement. One has to become like the self sacrificing Shiva, the ascetic, to be able to assimilate this poison and carry on. In others, the order of emergence





Indra on Airāvata



Serpent King Ananta



Moon on Shiva's head



Dhanvantari with pot of Amrita



Duvasa cursing in anger



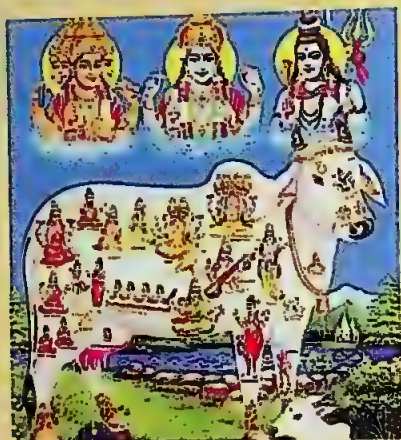
Garuda, carrier & follower of Vishnu



Shiva drinking the poison (Halāhala)



Jyestha or Alakshmi



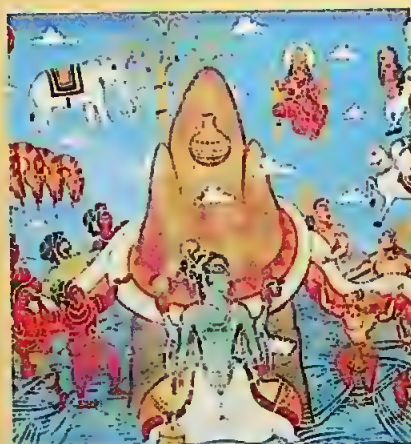
Kāmdhenu the holy cow



Kauṣṭubh on Vithoba's neck



Laxmi emerging from Ocean



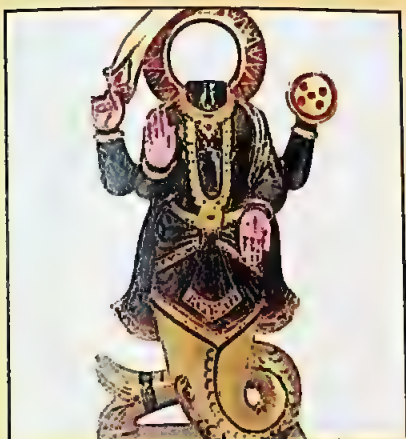
Kacchapavatar of Vishnu anchoring the Mandara below



Pārijāta in sculpture



Rahu iconography



Ketu iconography



Ucchairsravā the horse



Vasuki- Shiva's serpent



Mohini



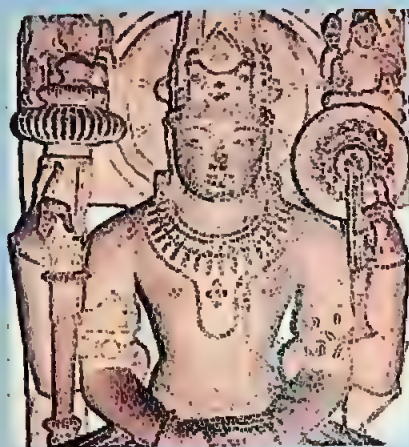
Buddhist iconography Vārūṇī



Panchajanya: Vishnu's conch



Sharanga : Vishnu's bow



Vishnu's Kaumodki Gada



Varun's umbrella



Sculpture of manthan at Angkor

is different, but it is accepted by all that some sacrifices will have to be made in order to be able to perform any great task. The idea should be that of the greater good of Humanity in general, and not a personal gain.

In the *Vishnu Purana*, one of the most authentic and ancient Puranas, the order in which they emerged is as follows

First came Surabhi, or Kāmdhenu, the celestial wish fulfilling cow. Obviously one who has succeeded in controlling their desire to such an extent as to be able to assimilate the poison which emerges, can now have the wish-fulfilling capacity at his command. However, that cow has its place in heaven and should not become a distraction. Then Vārūni, the goddess of wine, Pārijata the wish fulfilling tree, and a troop of Apsaras, the divine maidens that beautify the heavens also appear. The Moon then emerges, along with Dhanvantari.

Amrita is in the hand of Dhanvantari, the medicine god. This underlines good health as an essential requirement for Spiritual growth. Laxmi the goddess of prosperity, and every kind of Wealth, is gained by devas or positive tendencies who fight the Asuras or negativities vehemently.

Uchaisravas, and Airavata are also famous for their appearance along with Surabhi or Kamadhenu; and planets and precious gems like the Moon and the Kaustubhamani are taken by Shiva and Vishnu respectively. Some Puranas aver that the Varuni was also distributed by Mohini instead of the amrita, to the Asuras, others say the Āsuras did not accept Vārūni and she became the wife of Varuna, the god of the Sea, which is why they were called a-sura. The entire episode seems to be related to the rise of Laxmi in the *Vishnu Purana*, and the other puranas that follow its story.

Other sources include precious gems, more apsaras, the gada (Kaumodaki) and dhanush (Sharanga) of Vishnu along with Jyeshtha-goddess of misfortune, Varun's umbrella, Nidra or sloth and even the



earrings of Aditi rose back as they had vanished due to the curse of mighty Durvasa muni.

Airāvata is the celestial elephant. Important and revered among the celestial beasts of Hindu and Jain mythology, even mentioned in Buddhist mythology. It is known as the white elephant from the Royal stables of Indra, the King of the gods. He is the *vāhana* or carrier of Indra. Profusely mentioned in Indian literature and architectural sculptures, as well as Southeast Asian sculpture and art, it is traditionally depicted with seven trunks, and sometimes three as in Thailand. Normally an indicator of beneficial strength, it is sometimes indicative of pride. Since all elephants are traditionally believed to go through a period of slight inebriation (*mada*) due to the secretions behind their ears.

Chandra or the moon also emerged in crescent form since it had already waned in the sea. Shiva took him to adorn his forehead. He also gave refuge to Rāhu; such indeed is the magnanimity of Shiva.

Dramatis Personae

Airāvata

Airāvata is the proud five-headed elephant mount of Indra, the king among elephants, and well known to Cambodia and other Asian countries where many versions of it can be seen in sculpture and painting. His five heads remind one of the five senses that run helter-skelter unless controlled by the pointed mind the iron hook that controls the elephant. He rose out of the churning and immediately was claimed by Indra (also representing the Mind) who had lost him due to his ego-or arrogant behavior. As related in the story of the Kumbh, Airāvata the divine elephant, with Indra riding on him, once caused the ascetic Durvāsā great anger. Indra had kept the garland offered to him by Durvasa, on the head of Airāvata, the elephant on which he was mounted, instead of wearing it on his own head as a mark of respect. Airavata then flung it around as well. Angered, Durvasa cursed Indra and the gods vehemently. He said that all wealth or Sri or Laksmi, (the



goddess of auspiciousness, Beauty and Wealth), would be lost to the devas and their abode 'swarga', due to this insolent act of Indra and Airāvata. So the gods lost all their treasures that went back into the sea from where they had to be regained. Airāvata is known as Gajendra, the King of elephants. He is also the protagonist of the gajendra-moksha episode so often referred to in devotional poetry. Gajendra in dire stress, and when death stared him in the face, called out to Vishnu. Vishnu ran on bare feet to save him immediately. Such is the power of a true devotee. However the Airāvata of this story is arrogant insolent.

Ananta

The thousand headed Serpent King Ananta protects Vishnu like an umbrella. He is also the great serpent King and is sometimes misleadingly referred to as the serpent used for the churning, but it is Vāsuki who was used while Ananta egged him on. Both are related to the primary deities Vishnu and Shiva, and since both had played a significant role in this entire episode they are sometimes confused. Ananta or Seshanāga is the serpent demigod coiled up as the bed of Vishnu when Vishnu sleeps over the ocean of Milk. He is supposed to incarnate as a helper (pārshad) of Vishnu whenever the latter incarnates. So he eggs on Vāsuki when the latter tires. Laxmana is supposedly the incarnation of Ananta, hence he is always by the side of and in aid of Rāma.

Brihaspati

Jupiter. The largest planet as well as the 'guru' of the Devas when incarnate. His presence in any horoscope shows beneficial effects in the house and attributes of the house concerned. His perennial rivalry with Shukrācaryā, or the guru of the asuras and the personification of planet Venus, is proverbial. In astrology he is the largest planet and considered beneficial in whichever stellar configuration he enters. The Kumbha dates are closely related to his presence, as explained in the third essay.

Chandra, the Moon

The moon. Risen from the Ocean as a crescent, he was immediately



accepted by Shiva and as a mark of his love adorns the piled up hair over Shiva's head. According to legend he had been given all the daughters of Daksha in marriage but he was partial to Rohini, so he had been cursed with tuberculosis (kshaya roga) to lose his luster. Forgiven later, he periodically waxes and wanes. Shiva's acceptance returned his glorified place in the pantheon of the gods, along with the Sun god who is also a deva. Lord Shiva is known to be benevolent and easy to please. The waxing and waning of the moon is used to calculate the days and months in Indian Calendars. Thus, the moon symbolizes Time and Lord Shiva wearing the moon on his head denotes that Shiva has complete control over time. He is beyond the measure of Time and is eternal. Chandra is important to the story of the churning since he watches the evil daitya Rāhu and tells Vishnu just as Rāhu swallows the drops of Amrita, so that Vishnu cuts off Rāhu's head immediately. Rāhu then becomes the eternal enemy of Chandra, and swallows him periodically.

Devas and Daityas

Children of Kashyapa with his wives Aditi and Diti (daitya), step brothers with immense powers like demigods, perennially fight with each other. Many legends, in so many Puranas or ancient texts of Hindu mythology, refer to these fights and to the various tales of the devas and dānavas interacting with ancient Kings and commoners. Symbolically, of course they refer to the perennial tug of war between positive and negative tendencies and feelings within our heart.

Dhanvantari

God of Ayurveda. Physician of the gods. Supposed to be a part avatara of Vishnu. One of those who emerged from the Ocean of Milk with the pot of life giving amrita in hand. Usually shown with the book of Ayurveda or some herbs in one hand as well.

Durvāsa

The temperamental ascetic famous for his volatile anger. Durvāsa is ready to curse anyone who crosses his path. Woe betide anyone who angers him. From time immemorial, he has cursed the celestials and



humans whenever they have erred or been impolite. In this case the whole story began with his curse on Indra. Arrogantly, Indra forgot to dismount from his mighty seven tusked elephant. Even then, Durvasa acknowledging him as the king of devas presented him with a holy garland as prasadam. Indra carelessly threw it over the elephant's head without even touching it to his own forehead. This angered Durvasa and he immediately cursed Indra to lose all his powers, along with the devas. Hence he benefits of Swarga, the abode of the gods, were also lost. The other famous curse is immortalized in the Sanskrit drama *Abhijnyana Shākuntalam* of Kalidāsa, where Shakuntalā forgot to greet him as she was deeply engrossed in the thoughts of her lover King Dushyanta

Garuda

Celestial bird, carrier and follower of Vishnu, not related to Mahakumbh but often confused with Jayanta, because he too was instrumental in dropping *amrit* when he fought with the Nāgas to bring the pot of *Amrit* for his mother. There are many mythological stories about the perennial rivalry between the sons of Kadru and Vinata, the Nagas and Garuda. Both the mothers were co-wives of Kashyap rishi and hence the rivalry between step brothers vying with each other to prove their mother is superior to the other.

Halāhala

The poison that arose is enumerated as a Ratna. Often also known as Kālkoota, a poison which has no anti-dote. It signifies the fact that hard toil and facing difficulties is part of any worthwhile endeavor. Sometimes even the poison like effects of gossip and social ostracization need to be imbibed to complete any successful project. One must become like Shiva to be able to successfully deal with the problems that will arise in any worthwhile endeavor.

Indra

The Lord of *Swarga*, loosely translated as the heavens and therefore the King of the gods and demigods of the Hindu pantheon. Metaphorically



speaking he is equated with Manah or the Mind, (Manah Shasthāni Indriyāni)², with the sense organs representing the natural elements ruled by Indra. Since the mind controls the sense organs and the elements (Shabda, sparsh, roopa, rasa and gandha), The senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell, are related to Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth. Having become arrogant of all the natural powers he ruled, Indra behaved insensitively towards the mendicant Durvāsā and became the cause of all the gods losing their powers. Hence there was this need to have the churning episode to regain their strength. Symbolically it is a warning to the mind never to become arrogant specially when in positions of great power or great wealth.

Jayanta

Indra's son, who was handed the pot of elixir, to escape the asuras who were in hot pursuit. Jayanta, son of Indra, ran away with the famous *Amritkumbh* (the pot containing the elixir of immortality). Since the daityas were in hot pursuit, it took him twelve days to bring it back to the gods. One day of the gods is equal to one year of humans. This is the reason why in accordance with the stellar configuration, in every twelve years, the festival of Purna-Kumbh is celebrated at the four places where the pot had been placed while Jayanta was running away, dodging the daityas. Similar configuration or part configuration occur every six years, when half or ardh-Kumbh is celebrated.

Jyeshthā

Goddess of misfortune; also emerged, as the good emerges along with the bad, and has to be neutralized. She is sometimes known as Alakshmi, being the elder sister of Lakshmi. Her abode is in inauspicious places, where families quarrel or inauspicious and unclean things remain stored. As an ancient goddess she is found in old temple sculptures but is not so popular today. She is often shown as an old woman with a broom. Her appearance at the beginning of creation, signifies that in Life, one must be prepared to face misfortune that cannot be avoided and happens to everyone.

Kāmdhenu

The celestial, wish-fulfilling cow, with immense powers to feed thousands, she is known as the mother of all cows, and of the rudras. The rishis were given the cow as she would be very useful for the continuous yajnas they performed, residing with Vashist or Jamadagni Rishi . Vashisht had her in his ashram when King Vishwamitra wanted her, and fought for her. She produced armies to defeat the latter and hence the King became an ascetic himself.

She fed the hundreds of the army of Rama when he visited the ashram of Vashist Muni. She is free to roam the heavens as well as appear and disappear for her devotees on earth. Various parts of her body are supposed to be the abode of various powers. She is also known as Surabhi, Symbolically her legs are the Vedas, horns are the triumvirate of Hindu gods, shoulders are Agni etc. Iconographically, she sometimes is shown to have wings and a woman's head. She or her progeny are also referred to sometimes as Surabhi or Kapilā.

Kaustubha

The Lord Vithoba image wears the Kaustubha Kaustubhamani is the gem worn by Vishnu, and his various manifestations. In the Brahma Purana 1.3.9, Kaustubhamani has been described thus: Kaustubha is the best jewel among all the gems. One who bears it, must be gentle, knowledgeable, virtuous etc. Similarly, the Padmarāga mani, like Ruby, is also enumerated as rising from the Ocean in the Bhāgwata Purāna. The exterior of a god-fearing person on the spiritual path is usually gentle, soothing and delicately hued like the Padmarāg mani, exuding brilliance without pride or haughtiness. Precious Gems have therefore a pivotal role to play in Indian astrology.

Kumbh

The word Kumbh itself is imbued with layers of meaning as a sacred pot or kalash is placed at most auspicious occasions, and worshipped as representing all the gods and goddesses.



कलशस्य मुखे विष्णुः कण्ठे रुद्रः समाश्रितः
 मूले तस्य स्थितो ब्रह्मा मध्ये मातृगणाः स्थिताः
 कुक्षौ तु सागरः सर्वे सप्तद्वीपा वसुन्धरा
 ऋग्वेदौ यजुर्वेदः सामवेदो अथर्वणः
 अङ्गैश्च सहितं सर्वं कलशाम्बु समाश्रिताः

Vishnu resides at the mouth of the pot, Shiva at the neck, the base is the abode of Brahmā and the middle section of the surface has all the mother goddesses situated therein. Inside the pot, in the holy waters within reside the seven seas along with the seven continents and the whole world along with the four Vedas with all the Vedangas. The waters of the Kumbh that is adorned with five mango leaves and a whole Coconut on top, also represents all the Holy rivers like Gangā Yamunā etc. The water is sanctified by chanting:

*Gange cha Yamune cha Godāvari Saraswati
 Narmade Sindhu Kaveri, Jale asmin sannidhim kuru.*

Thus Nature and gods and goddesses all reside in the kalash which is also known as Kumbh. The holy waters within are used for sanctifying worship articles and blessing people. Huge Kumbhas are used for anointing the freshly invoked devatas with the ritual known as Kumbhābhishekam.

Lakshmi

The goddess of wealth and prosperity of all kinds, she is the consort of the personified active energy of Vishnu, usually also incarnating as his wife in the many incarnations of Vishnu. Revered in Jaina and Buddhist mythology, she has many mentions in various old texts, sculptures and paintings, and old coins etc all over India and Southeast Asia. She is also known as Sri, Vasudhāra and Kamalā, with the lotus flower. One of the most ancient goddesses of Hinduism, her images are found in coins dating back to the first millenium BC. Her place at the feet of Vishnu signifies that wealth should always be used for beneficial purposes of



charity and general good. She is fickle unless placed under Vishnu or nurturing power of benefit the universe. Sri, or wealth and Beauty of every kind, was lost to the Heavens due to Durvāsā's curse and emerged from the churning to return to her consort Vishnu, and all kinds of Beauty and wealth returned to the Heavens.

Mandāra Parvat

The mountain that is used as a churning rod for the episode producing the celestial treasures and the Amrita or elixir of immortality. Its remains are believed to be the granite hill located in eastern India, made of one huge rock not fragments. Kalidasa's Kumarsambhava alludes to it as having the footsteps of Vishnu. There are many ancient relics on the hills equally revered by the Jains. Has also been mentioned often as the venue of mythological battles, like that between Asuras and Vishnu, Krishna and Bānasura etc. Along with the story of the churning, this mountain is also popular in Khmer mythology. The word can be broken into two; 'man' meaning the mind, and 'dāra' meaning controlled. A steadfast mind is necessary for spiritual gain. Thus the nomenclature is pregnant with meaning.

Pārijāta

Also said to have risen from the churning, Pārijāta is the wish fulfilling tree of Heavens and was taken by Indrāni for her heavenly garden. The other name is Kalpataru- again referring to its wish fulfilling properties. Krishna stole it from Indrani to please his wife Satyabhāmā. The story is immortalized in the Sanskrit drama *Parijata haran*. It also refers to the coral jasmine tree that blooms in India at night between July and October, with beautifully scented flowers that drop early in the morning, coating the ground under it with fragrant white and orange blooms.

Rāhu-Ketu, the Asuras

Actually one Asura named Svarbhānu or Rāhu, Rāhu and Ketu are now divided into two, since he had cleverly cheated even Vishnu as Mohini by disguising as a god and sitting in line with them. The sun and moon



saw him, and told Vishnu (as Mohini) who immediately cut off his head before he could properly assimilate it. Since then Rāhu became immortal in two parts. Since then, Rāhu and Ketu the two nodes of the moon, exist as negative influences in horoscopes. Rāhu and are believed to 'swallow' (or cover the sun and moon periodically) the sun and moon at eclipse, only to regurgitate them since Rahu is without a belly. They are shown iconographically as only a head or as a tail. Rahu rides eight black horses and is shown as a horrible head without a body or with a tail. Ketu is shown as a fish or serpent tail. They are considered inauspicious. Rāhukāla is mentioned in daily horoscopes when no new or important work should be started.

Shiva-Pārvati

Shiva is one of the major players without whom the story would have ended with the Poison emerging first and the project being abandoned. Someone was needed to drink the Poison and only Shiva was considered capable of imbibing and neutralizing it. Even he suffered but accepted the suffering for the greater good of humanity. He became the favorite great God of the Trinity for many Indians, as this immense sacrifice for others became the ideal. There are quite a few stories related to how Shiva's suffering was neutralized by Pārvati his consort, and also as the Supreme mother goddess. Most of the Devi Purānas highlight this role of the female goddess. The Goddess Tāra of the famous Tārāpith in Bengal is thus a mother goddess, even saving Shiva writhing in pain as he drank the poison arising from the Ocean during the churning. Pārvati in the form of mother Tārā saved him by giving him her breast milk to neutralize the effect fo Kālakūta.

Many other Puranas mention Parvati as arresting the poison in Shiva's throat immediately by placing two fingers at his throat just when he drank the poison. Thus the poison was arrested at his throat which turned blue and Shiva was henceforth known as Neelkantha.

Shukrācharya

The guru of asuras who nurses a rivalry against Brihaspati, the guru of the gods. He looks after the interest of the Asuruas and is a very



learned guru himself. He is the one who tried to save the good Asura King Bali, when Vishnu demanded three steps of land and took the entire universe in charity. Shukra is the planet Venus, and Brihaspati is Jupiter. Shukra is therefore not a popular planet as far as the Kumbh dates are concerned.

Surya

Like Chandra, the Sun's role is pivotal, because he sees everything and also saw Rahu. He was assigned to watch over the pot of elixir when Jayanta ran away with it with the daityas in hot pursuit. He made sure the pot does not crack with all that running around for twelve human or one celestial year. The Kumbh cannot be held without his strong presence in the *Uttarāyana*, between mid January to Mid July, when the Sun moves Northward. For example the Sun and Jupiter both have to be in the configuration of Capricorn when the Kumbh occurs in Prayāg, after the Makar Sankrānti- the very date when the Sun turns northward and begins the Summer Solistice.

Uchchaisravās

King of Horses, white with seven heads, and wings, has been mentioned as the Lord himself in the Bhagvadgeeta. It emerged from the Ocean of milk and was taken by Indra in most versions and given to Daitya King Bali in some other versions. Seven Heads can be given many interpretations like five senses, mind and intellect – all need to be in control to ride the celestial mount.

Vāsuki

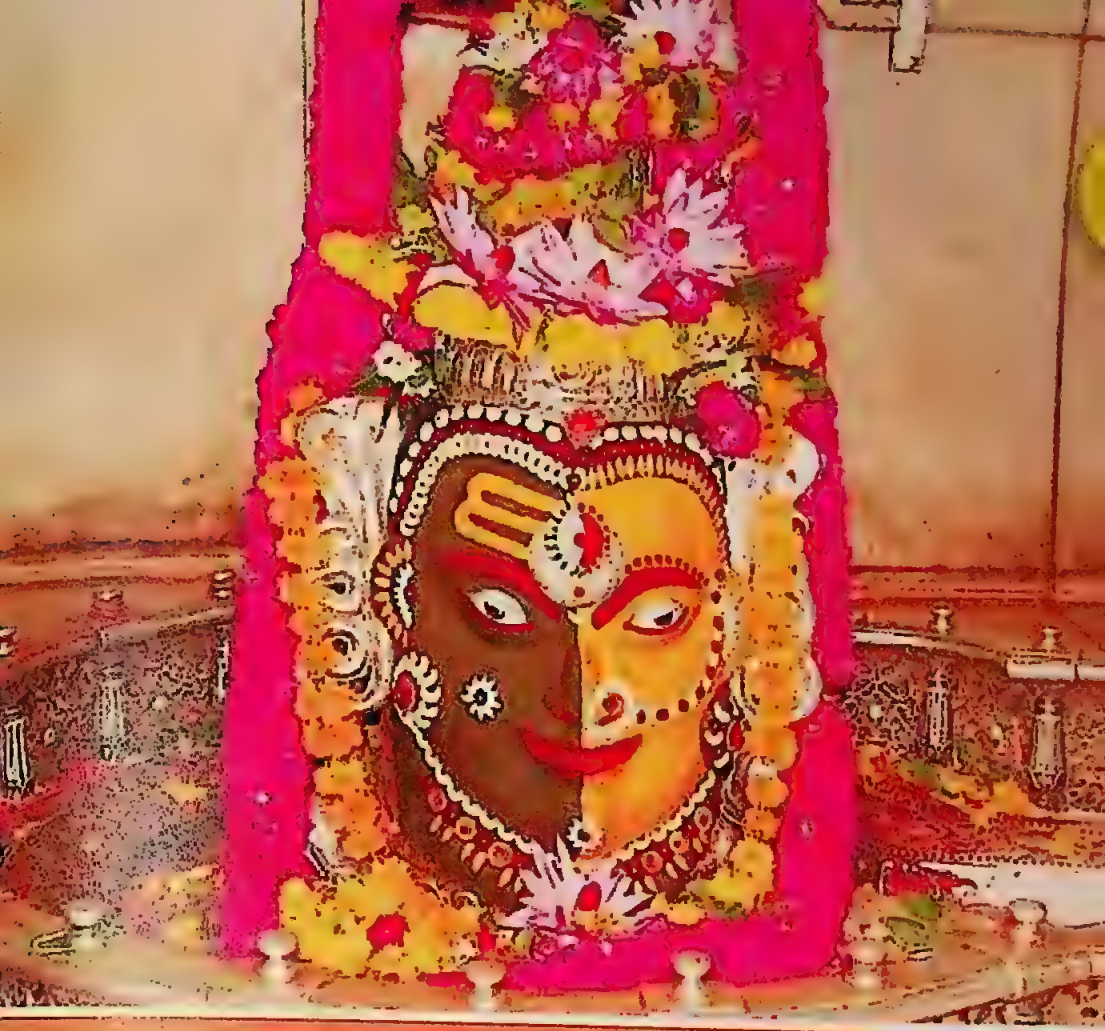
Shiva's snake. The Nāga or mythological Serpent King used as the rope around the Mandāra mountain which was used as the churning rod. After much churning, the serpent began to spew forth poisonous breath. His sister Manasā devi has her own legends, while Vasuki is known as one of the great Serpant kings in China and Japan as well, through Buddhist mythology. He is the eldest son of Kadru and Kashyapa. These mythological snakes are specially worshipped during Nāg Panchmi the snake festival. Vāsuki is described as a thousand headed snake.



Vishnu and Mohini

Vishnu, the other major player, pervades the entire story as mostly all roles other than that of drinking the poison are performed by Him- as he is a major god of the Hindu trinity. Sometimes Brahma is shown as sitting on top of the fulcrum used for churning, but in the Vishnu Purana it is Vishnu who steadies the Mandāra both from top as a deity, and from the bottom as the Kurma, just as he also energizes Vasuki and Mandāra itself. He is also the one who cleverly entraps the asuras into using their strength for the churning, while denying them the fruits of the immense labor, knowing that it would be a disaster if the negative Asuras also became as strong as the positive energies. In the Shaiva Purānas, his role is not so pronounced and it is Shiva, naturally, who is the major Heroic Lord - the supreme god of Trinity.





UJJAIN

Poorna Kumbh Special 2016





The Practical

This year the Poorna Kumbh Mela is going to be celebrated in Ujjain. Poorna means complete. All the conditions of the zodiac will be fulfilled in accordance with the story mentioned in ancient texts. The place and the time will thus be identical and therefore the dip in the waters of Kshipra river will be considered specially beneficent.

We plan to append a pullout booklet each year to indicate the details of the place (where the Kumbh Mela is happening) and its general attractions, so the pilgrim or tourist both may enjoy the visit to the Holy city of Ujjain during or after the Kumbh.



Ujjain – Poorna Kumbh Special 2016

Mentioned in almost all the ancient Puranas, Ujjain is a city of the Malwa region in central India. Situated on the eastern bank of the equally well-known Kshipra River, it is a part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. It is regarded as one of the seven sacred cities (Sapta Puri) of the Hindus and is one of the four sites along with Prayāg (Allahabad), Hardwar and Nasik that host the Kumbh Mela according to the Purānic lore. Millions of Hindu pilgrims from all over India and around the world, will be attracted to the Poorna Kumbh this year.

Ujjain is also famous for being the abode of the Mahākāleshwar aspect of Shiva, the primary player of the drama of the churning of the Oceans. If Shiva had not drunk the poison, there would have been neither the completion of the act of churning, nor the emergence of the many precious treasures (ratnas) including the Life enhancing nectar of the gods (Amrita). The Mahākāleshwar temple houses one of the twelve Jyotirlingas of India, and is considered exceptionally holy by all Hindus, and specially by the devotees of Shiva. In and around Ujjain also lie other important places of interest, like Sāndipani the ashram school where Lord Krishna, along with his elder brother Balarāma and friend Sudāma, had received his education from Sāndipani Muni. Sāndipani Muni had his ashram in the green forests surrounding this ancient city of Ujjayani.

Poorna Kumbh is held at Ujjain once in every 12 years when the zodiac sign Leo (Simha Rashi) indicates the arrival and presence of Jupiter in Leo. The city is enriched with several religious shrines such as Bade Ganeshji Ka Mandir, Mahakaleshwar, Vikram Kirti Temple and many others. Millions of pilgrims take dips and worship sacred River Shipra. Sages and devotees from every nook and corner attend the religious ceremony of Kumbh Mela to attain salvation and liberation from the vicious cycle of birth-death-rebirth.

The Mela at Ujjain is known as 'Simhastha Kumbh Mela' because while at Prayāg sangam or confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna the event



occurs when the Sun and Jupiter are in Capricorn, it occurs in Ujjain when the Sun is in Aries. (Simha means the Lion or Leo) Jupiter is in Leo, the moon in Tulā or Libra. It is known as being Simhasth or in the Simha constellation because Jupiter is in Leo. This happens only once in twelve years, so the rarity of the event makes it even more.

The atmosphere is electric as hordes of ash-dubbed sages, priests, and devotees gets fused together with the roaring of elephants and camels. People who witness the spiritual fest feel euphoric and good as they sense positive feelings purifying their souls and thoughts. The Major attraction of this festival is 'Shāhi Snan' (royal bath) which takes place on predetermined dates varying every time. This year the shāhi snan is on the 2nd april and 21st May. It is believed that special merit accrues to those who take the royal bath in holy Shipra River after the mendicants have finished their bathing on these auspicious days in the Ujjain Kumbh Mela. These Yogis perform severe penances all through the year and usually aggregate at the Kumbh Melas.

The astrological configuration to determine the dates in practice, is outlined in the sloka below. A holy dip then, in the ancient Kshiprā river of Kālidāsa fame, becomes specially meritorious when the following conditions occur,

माधवे धवले पक्षे सिंह जीवत्वजे खौ।
तुलाराशि निशनाथे स्वातिभे पूर्णिमा तिथौ।
व्यतिपाते तु सम्प्राप्ते चन्द्रवासर -संचुते।
कुशस्थली -महाक्षेत्रे स्नाने मोक्षमवाच्ययात्।

*Mādhve Dhawle Pakshe Simha Jivatveje khaou.
Tulārashi Nishānāthey swātibhey Purnima Tithaou.
Vyatipātey Tu Samprāptey Chandravāsar-Sanchute.
Kushsthalī-Mahākshetre Snāne Mokshmavāchyuyāt.*

One gets salvation after taking a dip in the holy river of Shipra in Ujjain when the month is Vaishakh, in the bright half of the moon while



Jupiter is in Leo, Sun in Aries, Moon in Libra, and the Swati star in full moon, It is called Vyātipath yoga. Liberation is surely acquired if a bath is taken in the Pious place of Kushasthali- Ujjain.

The auspicious dates for the 'snān' or bathing dip in the Shiprā river in Ujjain , in 2016 are as follows.

Chaitra Shukla 15, 22nd April, 2016 (Friday) Shahi Snān Royal bathing day Pancheshani Yatra Start
 Vaishakh Krishna 9, 1st May, 2016 (Sunday) to 6th May, 2016 (Friday) Vaishakh Krishna 30pancheshani Yatra
 Vaishakh Krishna 11, 3rd May, 2016 (Tuesday) vratparva varuthani Ekadashi
 Vaishakh Krishna 30, 6th May, 2016 (Friday) Vaishakh Krishna Amāvasyā
 Vaishakh Shukla 3, 9th May, 2016 (Monday) Akshaya Trītyā
 Vaishakh Shukla 5, 11th May, 2016 (Wednesday) Shankaracharya Jayanti
 Vaishakh Shukla 9, 15th May, 2016 (Sunday) Vrishabh Sankranti
 Vaishakh Shukla 11, 17th May, 2016 (Tuesday) Mohini Ekāda
 Vaishakh Shukla 13, 19th May, 2016 (Thursday) Pradosh
 Vaishakh Shukla 14, 20th May, 2016 (Friday) Nrisimha Jayant
 Vaishakh Shukla 15, 21st May, 2016 (Saturday) Pranukh Shahi Snan

Allahabad and Haridwar also host the partial configuration known as the Ardh Kumbh this year with auspicious bathing dates listed below. However, one can visit both places as is obvious from the dates, since the monnth of Māgh falls in the cold months of January-February, while the Ujjain dates are always more conducive and pleasant, as they fall in Vaishakh in April and May when a dip in the waters is very welcome indeed.

General Dates for Allahabad & Haridwar including the Kumbh dates.

14 January 2016 (Thursday)	Makar Sankranti - First Snan
08 February 2016 (Monday)	Mauni Amavasya Second Snan
12 February 2016 (Friday)	Vasant Panchami - Third Snan
22 February 2016 (Monday)	Magh Purnima - Fourth Snan
08 March 2016 (Tuesday)	Mahashivratri First Shahi Snan
07 April 2016 (Thursday)	Somvati Amavasya - Second Shahi Snan
15 April 2016 (Friday)	Ram Navami
22 April 2016 (Friday)	Chaitra Purnima Snan
06 May 2016 (Friday)	Amavasya of Krishna Paksh
21 May 2016 (Saturday)	Vaishakha (Shakh) Purnima



This year the Kumbakonam Mahāmaham (Mahā Makham) festival will also take place in the South when the Sun and Jupiter enter Leo on the 22nd of February between 12:00 and 1:00 pm. The Kumbakonam tank has 20 wells named after 20 major rivers. Since the festival here lasts only one day, the crowds are breathtaking. Usually the dip in the Mahāmaham tank is preceded or succeeded by a dip in the Kāveri River. All the temple deities from various Shiva and devi temples also come for a dip here on this day. The last Mahāmaham or Masimāham festival here occurred in 2004, so one can imagine the rush there is going to be here after twelve years. The mythological story here, is quite different from that of the churning of the ocean, nevertheless the stellar configuration is similar.

However this year Ujjain will be the star of the Kumbh gatherings, in the sacred city of Mahakāleshwar, one of the most the important Shiva deities. So we will detail some of the other spots that may be visited while taking a trip to Ujjain. Remember Shiva is the one who made it all possible, by sacrificing his personal welfare for the common good. He is the ultimate renunciate. The ritual immersion in the memory of this sacrifice is as important as remembering the churning of the Ocean and the search for the elixir of Life.

Lakhs of people will flock to Ujjain, in order to transcend mortality or to gain merit for living this Life, or with both spiritual and worldly intentions. By repeatedly participating in this experience, epitomized in the story of the churning, it would also be possible for them to mentally relate to their ancestors and to the wealth of spiritual knowledge that will be readily available here. Somewhere hidden here itself may be the knowledge of immortality, but the ancestors will be definitely pleased. It is exhilarating to know that from the Pāndavas and ancient Kings and Avatars like Rāma and Krishna, right upto our ancestors, all must have attended this very dip on this very auspicious place during this very same stellar conjunction.

They have all taught us that ultimately Good prevails over Evil. Knowing just that, and living with a moral code in itself, perhaps, leads us to



the elixir of Life, the *Amrita* we all seek. The *amrita* we must partake of, by sublimating the evil within us and encouraging the good in the inevitable and perennial tussle between the two, may be only partially achieved this time, but ultimately the right will prevail. By disciplining our mind and intellect with Faith and constant effort to overcome the mundane, we can reach our goals whatever they may be. However, the practical side of the journey cannot be overlooked. So arrangements must be made before going.

Before planning your trip, do look up the many websites that are available before you plan and chose the most authentic ones like the official websites for authentic information. Call up some numbers for changing information, and be careful and cautious as well.

<http://www.simhasthujain.in/>

<http://www.archaeology.mp.gov.in/>

<http://www.simhasthujain.in/officers/v-madhukumar/>

and some travel sites as well in case you wish to stay away from the venue, in modern comfort.

How to reach Ujjain

By Air one can reach Ujjain Via Indore – Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport (IDR) at Indore is the nearest airport to Ujjain, 55 km away. Indore is connected to major cities in India by air. It has direct air connectivity with New Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal, Pune, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Raipur and Ahmedabad. Taxi services are available to reach Ujjain from Indore airport.

The longer route would be Via Bhopal – Raja Bhoj Airport (BHO) at Bhopal is 172 km away from Ujjain, which could be a long and tiring road trip. Bhopal is the capital of Madhya Pradesh, the central province and has daily flights to and from New Delhi and Mumbai.

The other option is to go directly to Ujjain by TRAIN.

Ujjain railway station is a major junction of Western railway zone. It has many long distance and direct trains to almost all parts of India. You can board direct trains to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai,



Jammu, Jodhpur, Jaipur Udaipur, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Ratlam, Rajkot, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Pune, Gwalior, Bilaspur, Patna, Nagpur, Cochin, Hyderabad, Bangalore. Dehradun etc.

The Railways usually make special arrangements during the period of the Kumbh Melas in view of the massive loads of people all queueing to travel to Ujjain. Special trains will be running, but the rush will be unbelievable.

The Railways have decided that for the Simhasth Kumbh Mahaparv, trains coming to Ujjain will be halted at flag stations that are of little distance of 10-12 kilometers. The Railway stations have planned to have buses to reach Ujjain and the Mela area from these flag stations this year, to avoid too much rush at one station.

Although necessary arrangements will be made for the comfort of passengers at the flag stations according to plan, one must be prepared to rough it out a bit considering the huge populations that travel by train and bus. Tickets can be booked by rail through the website www.irctc.co.in.

Buses: Ujjain is well connected by road. Regular bus services are available from Indore (55 km), Gwalior (450 km), Ahmedabad (400 km) and Bhopal (183 km) to Ujjain. Air-conditioned buses are also available in these routes. Ujjain has two bus stands; one is near the railway station which has buses going towards for Agra, Kota and Nagda routes and the other is at the Nanakheda area to Indore and Maxi routes. You can book bus tickets from online travel portals and online and off-line travel agents. (www.charteredbus.in, www.redbus.in)

Taxi: safe, quick and comfortable travel as Inter-city packages trips (outstation trips) is available to Ujjain by many branded pan India, regional and Indore city cab service operators. Websites may be used to contact them initially but it is best to call and double check from all India and regional taxicab sites.



More practical guidelines regarding accommodation, food and attire In Ujjain, there are lots of hotels and similar establishments which are ready to host the visitors. If you are familiar with any major sects, it would be beneficial to find out what arrangements they may have at the Melā grounds. Most major sects and ashrams have their own camps at Kumbh Melā sites . Their detailed information is available at the official website www.SimhasthUjjain.in. Along with that, various camp accommodations with toilets will also be available in the Mela area.

Attempt is made by Mela officials to keep them clean and hygienic, but it is advisable to carry your own toilet needs and sanitizers etc.

Officials will also keep a close eye on hygienic food at Ujjain as it is their responsibility to avoid any untoward incidents during the Melā period. All departments of the government including the city hygeinic and medical arrangements are geared for the smooth functioning of the Melā.

Apart from the goverment arrangements, the temples and religious sects organize their own camps. Various Bhandara's (free food celebrations) are held where food shall be available to the visitors, as prasād. The Mela administration has made necessary arrangements to examine the hygiene and quality standards of the food stuffs being offered. Besides there will be shops just outside the melā grounds catering to the needs of the 'yātri's or 'travelers' as they are usually refered to in all pilgrim centers, to distinguish them from tourists.

This Kumbh festival happens in the summer season so the government has planned to have substantial arrangements to provide clean and chilled water. According to their official sites, many water-kiosks and water-booths shall be installed across the Mela area. However bottled water will be available and foreigners should be extra cautious and take care as they would in any other trip abroad. Keep medications and regular needs. These must be kept handy as it is better to be cautious than careless.



Any Kumbh melā and specially the Simhasth 2016 is a bathing festival. Bathing here signifies a dip only (and not a routine bath), hence be prepared for a dip where you will be allowed only few minutes at the banks of river Kshipra. No soap is expected to be used, and people usually have on a set of simple loose clothing in which to take a dip so that it can easily be changed once you are outside the water. It is not the cold January festival like Haridwar or Prayāg, so that it is no big deal. However do remember only Nāgā sadhus are allowed to bathe naked and they have separate timings before the common people can take a dip. For the purpose of bathing, 13 Ghāts are being further developed. The details of Ghats are available on the official website www.simhasthujain.in/about-simhasth/ghat-details/ but we have also given a list here

There will be some ATM's in the Mela area to facilitate the banking transactions. Always be cautious in using them. It is best to have some money in CASH in hand, and in smaller denomination as well, before you can locate convenient and safe ATMs on the Melā ground. Most transactions for food, travel etc will require cash as only few outlets accept cards normally, though some may be there.

Cultural tips

- Temple etiquettes play a very important role in the context of Indian culture. Across the India, shoes are taken off before entering any place of worship. It is preferable to keep shoulders and the lower part of the body covered while visiting a site of religious importance in India.
- Ujjain is a city of religious importance so be modest while choosing your attire to commensurate with the culture of the city. People usually keep their legs and shoulders covered. Moreover light weight outfits can cope with the midsummer heat of April-May, when it can become quite warm.
- Some of the following web links may be found useful, but do not expect wi-fi or readily available internet connections on the Melāground. Locate beforehand some venues where web browsing



may be available at a price
Identify nearest medical facilities before you settle down. The mela committees have made medical arrangements postal banking facilities. Find out all such locations thereof vis a vis the location of your accomodation.

Some important contacts in case of emergencies. But recheck when you arrive as numbers may change. Find out the numbers of 'on the spot' officials who are likely to be more easily available, and use the following only for ultimate redressal or emergencies.

This is merely a sample from the official websites just to let you know a lot of information has been put out by the officials on the net. Hundreds of numbers have been given in Hindi of all departmental officers like Public Hygiene, Medical and sanitary officers as well as law enforcement officials. So please make the most of it, if To save space we are not adding the honorific Mr. to each name, Kindly use Sri before the names in English. The phone numbers may change so on arrival go the central mela office and get the contact numbers.

<http://www.simhasthujain.in/zonesector-contacts/>

1	Office of Collector	Gopal Chandra Addtl. collector 9425185423	SR Solanki sector majistrate 9425189189	ShaktiSingh Chauhan Sector Magstrate 9424584222	
2	Police Dept	Manish Khatri Additional Superintendent of Police. 9425140202	R.K. Jain Inspector		B.P Gautam SSI 7049118270
3	Municipal Commissioner's office	9406801278 Addtl. Commisss Yogendra Patel.	Anil Jain Asst Engineer 9425094101	PC Yadav Addtl. Engineer 9993101600	Deepak Disāwal, addl eng. 9406801037
5	PWD Simhasth	9826953281 Rajendra Kumar Joshi Executive Engineer	Avinash Sivarla Asst. 9424073450	MM Mali Asst. 7898038750	HM Badkul Asst. 9424874075

Other attractions in and near Ujjain. What you must see and look for trips or conduct tours to the following places. A temple tour may be taken or arranged through travel experts to the Mahākāleshwar Temple, The Lord of Time.

It is one of the most important Jyotirlingas, one of the major twelve of the Shaivite pantheon. This is just another form of Shiva, in his King



of Time aspect. On different days the deity is decorated differently, sometimes showing a face (Mukhlinga) sometimes just covered with flowers.

It would be sacrilegious to visit Ujjain and not visit the Mahākāleshwar temple. Mahākāla is another name of Shiva- for He is the lord of Time, and therefore of Death. Ashes from the current funeral pyre are used for the early morning āratī- the bhasmārati, but later in the day also the darshan or viewing times are available and worth a visit.

Harsiddhi Mātā



The Place on the banks of Kshipra river, is for the idol of Mahakali. The elbow of Mother Sati is said to have fallen here, making this a very important temple known as a Shakti peeth. It is very near the Mahākāleshwar temple, just across the bridge. Harsiddhi, Annapurna, and Kali are placed one above the other. Harsiddhi is described as Vaishnavi Shakti. A Sri yantra

is carved in the temple. The temple is called as Harsiddhi darwaja. The hall in front of the Garbha Griha is painted in the roof with pictures of fifty Matrika Devis. There are two very big Deepa stambhas in the temple campus. Prayageshwar shiva linga is near by Harsiddhi.

Kālbhairav Temple



Kāl Bhairav temple in Ujjain was built by King Bhadrasen, and is situated on the banks of river Shipra. It is another interesting ancient temple, where the Kālbhairav idol, as per traditional belief and character, will drink up alcohol when offered. He is the guardian of the city of Ujjain, so he must be worshipped first.

Chintamani Ganesh



A beautiful and peaceful place, a little far from the city. One has to climb stairs. Chintamani Ganesh Temple is at outer Ujjain, accessible by road. It has a good scenic view. This temple is very famous among locals and on Wednesday, the day of Ganesha, is full with worshippers.

This temple is built across the Shipra river on the Fatehabad railway line. The Ganesh idol in this temple is supposed to be Swayambhu - born of itself or having appeared by itself. Riddhi and Siddhi, the consorts of Ganesha, are seated on either side of Ganesha. It is 5 km. from the Ujjain railway station, one can reach here by public transport, private vehicle or an enjoyable short ride by train. The Ganesha here is also called Chintāhara, as it is supposed to take away all worries.

Mangalnath Temple

Temple to the planet Mars, supposedly ruler of Aries, and Scorpio. People who believe they have Mangaldosh, often come here to pray.

Sāndeepany Ashram



Sāndeepani was a guru of Lord Krishna. The Sandipani Muni ashram is located 5 km from Ujjain railway station. The area near the ashram, known as Ankapata, is popularly believed to have been the place used by Lord Krishna for washing his writing tablets. The numerals 1 to 100 are found inscribed on a stone. They are believed to have been

engraved by Guru Sandipani. Near the ashram is the Gomti Kund, a staircased water tank where Krishna supposedly summoned all the holy waters from various centres so that his old Guru, Sandipani Muni would not have to travel other holy places.



The Gomti Kunda, referred to in the Puranas, was the source of water supply to the ashrama in the olden days. An image of Nandi, belonging to the Shunga period, is to be found near the tank. The followers of the Vallabha sect regard this place as the 73rd seat of the 84 seats of Vallabhacharya where he had delivered his discourses throughout India.

Garh Kālīkā Temple



A Kālī temple with an attractive idol. Supposed to be the Istadevi (favorite goddess) of Kālidasa, the great Sanskrit poet. During 7th century this ancient temple of Kalika was reconstructed by King Harshwardhan of Thaneshwar when he visited Ujjain. The site is indeed the most ancient temple of Ujjain, even though the present temple is not so

ancient. Subsequently, the Gwalior rulers rebuilt this holy shrine to its former glory. Bricks, a part of the plinth and other sculptures that were affiliated to various periods, like the Gupta period of the 4th century and the Parmar rulers of the 11th-12th centuries, have been found in excavations at this site.. It seems the area around the Garh Kālīka had been the site of the ancient settlements from around the 8th century BCE right upto Paramara period. It is said that even today people find ancient coins in this area. It is near the Bhartihari caves.

Bhartihari caves



King Vikramāditya's brother, the famous saint poet Bhartihari, lived and meditated here. His works *Shringārshataka*, *Vairāgyashataka* and *Nitishataka*, were probably written here.

A real pilgrimage for the literature lovers.

Pir Matsyendranāth

This is very attractive spot on the banks of Shipra River, quite close to the Bhartrihari Caves and the Gadkalika temple. The shrine is



dedicated to a leader of the Nathā sect of Shaivism- Matsyendranath. It is also venerated by Muslims. Excavations here have yielded artifacts dating to the 6th and 7th century BC.

Siddhavata



This is an ancient and huge Banyan tree, on the banks of the Shipra, considered sacred since the medieval ages. In the Hindu psyche, this has the same significance as that of akshayavata in Prayag and Gaya, Vanshavata of Vrindavan and Panchavata of Nasik. Thousands of people take dip in the Shipra River from the bathing ghats built here. According to one tradition,

Parvati is believed to have performed her penance here. It used to be a place of worship for the followers of the Nātha sect. Obviously areas nearby were favorite spots for the ancient Nātha sect. The little village of Bhairogarh near Siddhawata is famous for its tie-and-die printing for centuries. In ancient times, when the silk trade with other countries flourished, it is believed that exquisitely printed cloth from Bhairogarh used to find its way to Rome and China.

Kaliadeh Palace



Situated on the banks of Shipra River this is another beautiful ancient site in Ujjain. It is believed that there was once a majestic Sun temple at this site. The Avanti-mahātmya of Skanda Purana has recorded a description of the Sun temple and two tanks that are here, The Surya Kunda and the Brahma Kunda are in the campus. Remains of old temples are

scattered all around. A fragmented inscription of this place records building of the palace in 1458 AD, in the time of Mahmud Khilji. The central dome of the palace is a beautiful example of Persian architecture. Two Persian inscriptions record the visits of Akbar and Jehangir to this



palace. The palace was broken by the Pindaris and was restored by Madhav Rao Scindia in 1920.

The Krishnārṅk Sun temple is said to have built by Krishna while the brahm Kunda is also known as Bāvan Kund.

There are many other places of interest in Ujjain Vedh Shala or Jantar Mantar is located in the holy city of New Ujjain. It is an observatory built by Maharaja Jai Singh II in 1725 which consists of 13 architectural astronomy instruments. The observatory is one of the five observatories built by Maharaja Jai Singh II when he was governor of Ujjain.

Chaubis Khambā Temple

Chaubis Khambā Temple It is a very old temple, dating back to the 9th or 10th century AD. As the name suggests this place is well known for 24 pillars. Worth a visit.

The Pātāl Bhairava temple

A famous temple dedicated to the Shakti (power) of the mother Goddess namely, Patal Bhairav Temple has an interesting legend behind it. As per Hindu mythology, a cruel and selfish demon, Bhairav Nath once chased Vaishno Devi, the reincarnation of Mother Goddess. In order to flee, the Devi shot an arrow in the ground from where water rushed out and took shelter in a cave. However, Devi had to assume the form of Mahākālī to kill Bhairav after he found her. Just before dying, Bhairav begged for pardon and was granted Moksha along with a boon wherein each one of the devotees after the darshan of the Mother Goddess at the Holy cave, have to visit the nearby temple of Bhairav Nath in order to fulfill their pilgrimage. The caves are beautiful and strange, but narrow.

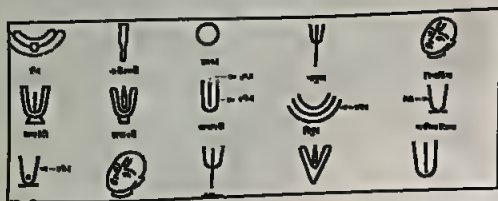
There are so many other places like Gopal Madir, Bade Ganeshji ka Mandir, Navagraha Mandir (Triveni), a temple dedicated to the nine planets, Ram Janārdhan Temple, Harihara Tirtha, Mallikārdjuna Tirtha, Ram Ghāt, Gangā Ghāt, Bohron Ka Rojā, Begum Ka Maqbarā. Ram ghāt Bina Neev Ki Masjid, Maulana Rumi Ka Maqbarā, Simhasan Battisi Mandir. Bada Ganpati & Pancha Mukhi Hanuman.



Simhastha Ujjain 2016**Simhasth Kumbh Mahâparv Ujjain 2016****Holy Dip Dates (Snaan Dates) AND PARIKRAMÂ YATRA DATES****PARVA Between - Chaitra Shukla Purnima****Vaishakha Shukla Purnima, Vikram Samvat 2073****Pancheshani Yatra - Vaishakh Krishna 9, 1st May, 2016 (Sunday) to
Vaishakh Krishna 30, 6th May, 2016 (Friday)****Shai Snân - Chaitra Shukla 15, 22nd April, 2016 (Friday)****Vratparv Varuthani Ekadashi - Vaishakh Krishna 11, 3rd May, 2016
(Tuesday)****Vaishakh Krishna Amavasya - Vaishakh Krishna 30, 6th May, 2016
(Friday)****Akshaya Tritiya - Vaishakh Shukla 3, 09th May, 2016 (Monday)****Shankaracharya Jayanti - Vaishakh Shukla 5, 11th May, 2016
(Wednesday)****Vrishabh Sankranti - Vaishakh Shukla 9, 15th May, 2016 (Sunday)****Mohini Ekadashi - Vaishakh Shukla 11, 17th May, 2016 (Tuesday)****Pradosh - Vaishakh Shukla 13, 19th May, 2016 (Thursday)****Nrisimha Jayanti - Vaishakh Shukla 14, 20th May, 2016 (Friday)****Pramukh Shâhi Snân - Vaishakh Shukla 15, 21st May, 2016 (Saturday)****The Tilaks and Akhâdâs of Simhastha 2016**

The Schools or sects that not only have special privileges at the Kumbh Snâna festivals but are a special attraction of the event for tourists and laymen householders alike, are known as Akhâdâs. They are treated like Royalty and their inaugural bath in the waters is known as the Shâhi Snân or the Royal Bath. They wear different marks on their foreheads and bodies signifying their differences in belief and practices. The Tilak or mark on the forehead is a case in point. For example- The *tilak* on saints' forehead is necessary as it lets people to identify their sects or spiritual leanings. These *tilaks* on the foreheads of saints from different akhâdâs, and sects are an attraction for the pilgrims.





The Sadhus have different beliefs regarding the markings on their bodies. There are three types of communities, which use

sandalwood, gopi chandan and roli (herbal powder) as tilak. The Saints from the Vaishnav sect wear *Oordhvapundra* (vertical- towards above), Shaiv sect wears *tripundra* (three horizontal lines) and the mother goddess or Shakti sects wears roli.

Tilaks or forehead marks are supposed to help the Sâdhus to rise above the three states of consciousness mentioned in the Mândukya Upanishad, that of the waking, dream and deep sleep states. These become a mean to attain God. It is said that due to kalikâla (bad times) distractions are powerful and men may indulge in worthless thoughts. A kind of energy emerges at the center of the forehead (place of the Âjnya chakra) and the *tilak* enables the *sadhus* to control that energy to keep away from denigrating thoughts.

The Shaiva and Vaishnava sect sadhus also claim that the tripundra and urdhvapundra denote their loyalty to the Gods – Lord Shiva and Lord ShriRama respectively. The Shakti Sect wears roli or black/red *tilak*.

The middle of the forehead is the spot of the Ajnya Chakra Just as the redspot of roli worn by a woman denotes her loyalty to her one and only husband, the single black round in the center of the forehead of a Shâkta devotee shows that God is one, while the three lines may signify the three qualities Satwa, Rajas and Tamas, or the three powers of Creation, Sustenance and Destruction, or that of Brahmâ, Vishnu and Shiva are essentially One.

There are Many Ghâts or stepped bathing places in Ujjain suitable for the holy dip Ram ghat, gau ghat, triveni ghat Mangalnath ghat, Siddhawati ghat, Kabir ghat, in Mukteshwar ghat, Bhokri mâtâ ghat, Datta akhara ghat, Chintaman ghat, Prashantidham ghat, Narsimha

Detail Of Akharas

S.No	Naname Name	Contact Person	conHead Office
1	Shri Panchayati Taponidhi Akhara	Shri Mahant Laltagiriji Maharaj (Sachiv) Shri Panchayati Taponidhi Niranjani Akhara Mayapur Haridwar, (Uttaranchal) Shri Mahant Ramanand puri ji Maharaj (Sachiv) Shri Panchayati Taponidhi Niranjani Akhara Mayapur Haridwar, (Uttaranchal)	Mahant Shri Vishwanath Giri ji Niranjani Akhara, Badnagar Road, Ujjain
2	Shri Panchayati Anand Akhara	Shri Mahant Sagarand ji Maharaj Shri Panchayati Anand Akhara Trayambkeshwar, Distt. Nasik, Maharashtra	
3	Shri Panchdashnaam Juna Akhara	Shri Mahant Parmanand ji Saraswati (Sabhapati) Shri Panchdashnaam Juna Akhara, Bada Hanuman Ghat Kashi, Varanasi (U.P.) Shravannath Nagar Haridwar Shri Mahant Uma Shankar Bharti Ji Maharaj, (Sachiv) Shri Panchdashnaam Juna Akhara, Bada Hanuman Ghat Kashi, Varanasi (U.P.) Shri Mahant PremGiriji Maharaj, (Sachiv) Shri Panchdashnaam Juna Akhara, Bada Hanuman Ghat Kashi, Varanasi (U.P.) Shri Mahant ji Maharaj (Sachiv) Mayadevi Bhairav Akhara Haridwar (Uttaranchal) Kankeshwari Devi Ashram Shri Mahant Surendra Giri Ji, Maharaj (Sachiv) Mayadevi Bhairav Akhara Haridwar (Uttaranchal)	Peer Mahant Ramgiri Pratinidhi Rameshwar Giri Datta Akhara, Ujjain Peer Mahant Ramgiri Pratinidhi Rameshwar Giri Datta Akhara, Ujjain



4	Shri Panchdashnaami Avahan Akhara	Shri Mahant Shiv Shankar Giri ji Maharaj (Sabhapati) Shri Panchdashnaami Aavhan Akhara Ashwamedh Ghat, Kashi Varanasi (U.P.) Shri Mahant Prem Puri ji Maharaj (Sachiv) Shri Panchdashnami Avahan Akhara Ashwamedh Ghat, Kashi Varanasi (U.P.)	Pratinidhi : Shri RajShekhar Tripathi, Bada Sarafa, Ujjain
5	Shri Panch Agni Akhara	Shri Mahant Gopalanand Ji Maharaj (Sabhapati) Shri Panch Agni Akhara, Shambhupanch Agni Akhara, Mu.Po. Bilkha, Junagadh (Sourashtra) Gujrat Shri Mahant Govindanand Ji Maharaj (Sachiv) Shri Panch Agni Akhara, Shambhupanch Agni Akhara, Mu.Po. Bilkha, Junagadh (Sourashtra) Gujrat	Mahant Shri Sudamanand Ji Rajrajeshwar Hanuman Mandir, Pool k niche, Sindhiya Dharmshala k paas, Ujjain
6	Shri Panchayati Mahanirvani Akhara	Shri Mahant Prakashpuri Ji Maharaj (Sachiv) Shri Panchayati Mahanirvani Akhara, Kankhal, Haridwar (Uttaranchal)	Shri Mahant Prakashpuri Ji Maharaj (Sachiv), Shri Panchayati Mahanirvani Akhara
7	Shri Panch Atal Akhara	Shri Mahant Rajgiriji Maharaj, (Sabhapati) Shri Shankargiri ji Maharaj, (Sachiv) Shri Panch Atal Akhara Kankhal, Haridwar (Uttaranchal)	Mahant Shri Premgiri ji Maharaj
8	Udasin Akhare Shri Panchayati Bada Udasin Akhara	Shri Mahant Raghumuni ji Maharaj Shri Panchayati Bada Udasin Akhara Ram Ghat Ujjain	Pratinidhi : Shyamdas ji Maharaj



9	Shri Panchayati Udasin Naya Akhara	Shri Mahant Manohardas ji Maharaj, (President) Shri Panchayati Udasin Naya Akhara, Kankhal, Haridwar (Uttaranchal) Kankeshwari Ashram Ashok Nagar Gujrat	Shri Jagtar Muni, Mod Dharmshala k Paas, Ramghat, Ujjain (Jakhira Prabandhak)
10	Shri Panchayati Nirmal Akhara	Shri Mahant Gyandev Ji Maharaj Shri Panchayati Nirmal Akhara Kankhal Haridwar Uttaranchal	Shri Darshan Singh ji, Nirmal Akhara, Badhnagar Road, Ujjain
11	Bairagi Akhade (Ramadal Vaishnav) Shri Panchramanandaye Nirvani Ani Akhara	Shri Mahant Shivrnanandas Ji Maharaj Shri Panchramanandaye Nirvani Ani Akhara, Shri Bihariji Mandir Barana Bamori Distt. Tikamgad (M.P.) Shri Mahantdas Ji Maharaj Shri Panchramanandaye Nirvani Ani Akhara, Hanumangarhi Ayodhya (U.P.) Shri Mahant Jagannathdasji Maharaj, Khaki Akhara (Nirvani Ani), Lambe Hanuman Mandir Lambe Hanuman Road Railway Station k paas, Surat Gujrat	Mahant Shri Sudhir Pujari, Sansthan Shri Kalika Mandir, Panchwati Nasik Sthaniya: Mahant Shri Bhagwandas ji Beghampura Ujjain. Mahant Shri Premdas ji, Khaki Akhara, Khak Chowk Ankrat Ujjain. Mahant Shri Premdas ji, Khaki Akhara, Khak Chowk Ankrat Ujjain.
12	Shri Panch Digambar Ani Akhara	Shri Mahant Keshavdas ji Maharaj Shri Panch Digambar Ani Akhara (Digambar Akhara) Ayodhya U.P. Shri Rambela Math Shastri Marg Dungarpur Rajasthan	Mahant Shri Kanhaiyadas ji Ankrat Road, Ujjain Mahant Shri Bhagwandas ji, Beghampura Ujjain
13	Shri Panchramanandiya Nirmohi Ani Akhara	Shri Mahant Ram Ashraydas ji Maharaj Shri Panchramanandiya Nirmohi Ani Akhara Nirmohi Akhara, Ramghat Chitrakoot, Dist Bana	Mahant Shri Raghuveerdas ji, Khak Chowk Ujjain. Mahant Shri Bhagwandas ji Beghampura, Ujjain.



The Main Akhadas of Simhastha Ujjain 2016

S.No	Name	Peshvai From --- to
1	Panchdashnâmi Juna Akhada	Neel Ganga --- Datta Akâhdâ
2	Panchâyati Anand Akhâdâ	Meelgangâ---Choti rapat bâd Nagar road
3	Panchâyati Mahânirvâni	Neelganga ---Dutta Ahâdâ
4	Nirvâni Ani Akhâda	Begumpura ---Ankpât
5	Nirmal Akhâdâ	Sankhyaraje Dharmshâlâ---Râmghât
6	Digambar Ani Akhâdâ	Begumpura ---Khâkchowk
7	Nirmohi Akhâdâ	Begumpura ---Ankpaat
8	Panchâyati Nayâ Udâseen Akhâdâ	Sindhi Colony--- Badanagar road Hanuman Bâg
9	Panch Atal Akhâdâ	Neelgangâ ---Datta akhâda
10	Taponidhi Niranjani Akâdâ	Sankhyaraje Dharmshâlâ ---Danigate Rajput Dharmashâlâ
11	Panchâyati Bada Udaseen akhâda	Alakhdhâm Dharmashâlâ --- Danigate Rajput Dharmashâlâ
12	Panchâyati Agni Akhâdâ	Neelganga --- Datta âkhâdâ
13	Panchâyati Avâhan Akhâdâ	Neelganga--- Datta âkhâdâ

ghat, sunehri ghât etc. Details and pictures with maps of all these can be seen at the official website. <http://www.simhasthujain.in/temple-details/> The 84 Shiva temples to visit as well as other ancient famous temples along with the unusual Nagarkot ki Rani temple may be also seen there before arranging a visit them . However, one may need to go outside the Mela area to visit all of them.



Some famous saints also reside there, who can be considered teerthas themselves. The famous ascetic Parampoojya Sri Mauni Baba resides in an Ashram a little outside the city. He is a saint of great repute and blesses people who sincerely seek spirituality.



edited and translated over hundred books in Hindi and English. He also edited several journals and magazines. A Master of the *Knibandh* genre, he was a popular orator for cultural as well as scholarly occasions. For invaluable services in the field of literature, he was decorated first with Padma Shri and later with Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. He was the recipient of the prestigious Moortidevi Award instituted by the Bharatiya Jnanpeeth, one of the highest for the literary genre he excelled in. A senior member of the Sahitya Akademi, he was the guiding spirit of many a literary and social organization. He was closely associated with the Encyclopedia of Hinduism and the Hindi monthly Sahitya Amrit. He was a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha.



Dr. Ramnaresh Tripathi
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& Chairman of the
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Born in 1947, Dr Tripathi is not only a renowned Journalist and an eminent Astrologer, but also a leading scholar of India, who holds Double Masters in Economics and Acharya along with a D PH Economics from the University of Allahabad. His works on Yogi Samrat Devraha Baba, seminal works on those who wish to research or progress in the field of inner Yoga. He has also co-authored and edited several other books on Adi Shankaracharya, Indian culture and mythology in English, Hindi and Sanskrit.

Dr Tripathi published the Astrological weekly Jyotish Prakash in 1997 and established Prachya Vidya Jyotish Adhyayan Evam Anusandhan Sansthan in 1998. He has numerous prizes and awards to his credit the Jyotish Vachaspati by Indian Council of Astrological Sciences in 2008, Jyotish Ratna by Indian Council of Astrological sciences in 2004, Jyotish Shiromani by International Organization of Astrology and Vedic Sciences in 2004, Jyotish Mahrishi by Bhartiya Jyotish Peeth, Lucknow in 2000, Raj Jyotishi, Bhartiya Jyotish Parishad, Kanpur in 2000, International Award by America and Canada Hindi Samiti, He is currently working with the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, as Director of Astrology Department in Allahabad. Recently he has been appointed as a Visiting Professor at the Hindu University in Florida.

In the Ocean of the mind Positive and Negative energies constantly aspire to overcome each other. Sometimes the Positive energies win, at other times they lose to the strong Negative impulses. Such is the Nature of the Human mind, that this churning is inevitable and must go on for each Mind to evolve, and for mortals to find a meaningful existence by relating to a Timeless dimension spiritually and mentally.

The need to control the mind becomes apparent to the Spiritual seeker. Under the direction of a Guru steeped in tradition, this churning itself may be an end in itself and produce innumerable gems of fortitude and bliss. They will be gems of great worth that will hold the traveler in good stead on the path of Spiritual progress. This ritual immersion in the memory of the churning has to be remembered periodically, in a moment that uses Time to transcend Time. That is the secret of the Kumbh-Mahakumbh 'melas' in India, where millions gather at the appointed Space and Time, to rejuvenate their Selves with a few drops of Spiritual Ambrosia.

The authors Misra, Tripathi and Lahiri elaborate these varied aspects of an age old event that occurs regularly in India; i.e. The Kumbh Mela, known as the largest human gathering that takes place at regular intervals. Apart from all the logistics and paraphernalia involved, it epitomizes the ability of the Human Spirit to use the Mind as an instrument to overcome the boundaries of mundane and mortal existence and evolve into a timeless dimension of Spiritual Seeking. The story behind the event exists in popular mythology and is known even in Japan, China and specially in South east Asian countries, but nowhere else has the popular mind been attracted for generations to four spots at preordained times related to the myth, in order to relive the myth and thereby rejuvenate it and themselves.



Price: ₹ 995.00
ISBN: 9788182903883



Shubhi Publication
479, Sector 14,
Gurgaon-122 001, India